James Beattie's The Minstrel (1771, 1774): Its Influence on Wordsworth

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James Beattie's *The Minstrel* (1771, 1774): Its Influence on Wordsworth

Similarities between *The Minstrel* and Wordsworth's poetry have been pointed out from time to time. All of these citations, however, have been given for the most part to illustrate in some small way Wordsworth's development. No satisfactory attempt has been made to view these similarities from the angle of Beattie's vision and thus to evaluate his contribution to Wordsworth's growth as a poet. Beattie has usually been denied any significance here except where he provides an apt illustration of Wordsworth's indebtedness to eighteenth-century sources. On the contrary the thesis of this paper is that Wordsworth owes a great debt to *The Minstrel*, for those similarities which have been largely called coincidental, with others which have not been noted, are really of considerable significance. One must first look to *The Minstrel* itself for proof of this.

With the possible exception of Gray's *Elegy*, it was the most popular and highly-praised poem of the second half of the eighteenth century. Samuel Rogers's reaction is typical: "I remember taking Beattie's *Minstrel* down from my father's shelves, on a fine summer evening, and reading it for the first time, with such delight! It still charms me . . . ." The poem's phenomenal appeal may be seen in the number of editions published between 1771 and the 1820s—fifty-one—in the many requests for Beattie to finish the poem, and in the several imitations and continuations. In the Romantic period most new editions were noted by all the major magazines. A reviewer in *Blackwood's Magazine* writes that in 1812 "Beattie was the man of highest and most deserved reputation" and that "the Minstrel was . . . incomparably the best

1. In many places I have used similarities which have been cited by others. I did not think that it was necessary to acknowledge these debts since I have attempted to use the materials in a new way by focussing on the extent and significance of Beattie's influence on Wordsworth.


work from the hand of any [contemporary] writer. In the same year Byron cites the poem as an excellent authority for the use of the Spenserian stanza in Childe Harold. When Wordsworth was going through the crucial formative years of the 1790s and early 1800s The Minstrel was regarded as one of the greatest poems of the age. It seemed the perfect amalgam of neo-classic poetic principles and acceptable originality; what are now identified as Romantic elements in it were then seen as the culmination of the nature poetry of Thomson's The Seasons. But the treatment of nature was merely one of many aspects which fascinated its early readers; its main appeal lay in the way it used many current ideas and earlier writings. Sentimentalism, melancholy, didacticism, medievalism and primitivism combined with echoes of the Bible, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Ossian, Gray, Blackwell’s Homer and the classics to form a unified, coherent poetic structure. In a word The Minstrel is very much a neo-classic poem, so that the attempt to view it as primarily Romantic is to distort badly its meaning and appeal to its early readers. Nevertheless there is ample evidence that Wordsworth came under the spell the poem cast over the whole reading public.

The poem is an unfinished narrative of two Spenserian cantos, the first of which was published in 1771, when Wordsworth was one year old, and the second in 1774. It tells of the education, by custom, experience and nature, of Edwin, a poetically-inclined youth. It is autobiographical and is therefore, as indicated by its subtitle, "The Progress of Genius," the first attempt in English to trace the development of a poet’s own mind. The implications of this fundamental link with Wordsworth are an essential part of the poem’s informing principle, especially in its emphasis on the importance of the natural world. Nature can bring supreme blessings to man Beattie writes:

The gentle Muses haunt the silvan reign;  
Where thro’ wild groves at eve the lonely swain  
Enraptured roams, to gaze on Nature’s charms.  

(Liv)*

The poet makes the Wordsworthian contrast between the vanity of the world and the splendours of nature and thus utters a cry which had never been raised before in English poetry with such poignancy and directness:


5. The Works of Lord Byron (London, 1899), II, 4-5.

BEATTIE’S MINSTREL AND WORDSWORTH

O how canst thou renounce the boundless store
Of charms which Nature to her votary yields!
The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields;
All that the genial ray of morning gilds,
And all that echoes to the song of even,
All that the mountain’s sheltering bosom shields,
And all the dread magnificence of Heaven,
O how canst thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven!

(Ixx)

The next stanza begins with a clear indication that Beattie saw a moral force working in external nature:

These charms shall work thy soul’s eternal health,
And love, and gentleness, and joy impart.

It is obvious that Beattie’s view of nature is a new kind of poetic vision, and one would therefore expect the poem, in spite of the strictures of the time, to express this vision in a novel way. The following selections show that it does.

Oft when the winter storm had ceas’d to rave,
He roam’d the snowy waste at even, to view
The cloud stupendous, from th’ Atlantic wave
High-towering, sail along th’ horizon blue:
Where, midst the changeful scenery, ever new,
Fancy a thousand wondrous forms descries,
More wildly great than ever pencil drew,
Rocks, torrents, gulls, and shapes of giant size,
And glittering cliffs on cliffs, and fiery ramparts rise.

(I.Iii)

The crimson cloud, blue main, and mountain gray,
And lake, dim glesning, on the smoky lawn:
Far to the west the long long vale withdrawn,
Where twilight loves to linger for a while.

(I.xx)

Dark woods and rankling wilds, from shore to shore,
Stretch their enormous gloom.

(II.I)

... in the dark east, expanded high,
The rainbow brightens to the setting sun!

(I.xxx)

While waters, woods, and winds, in concert join.

(I.xix)

The wild brook babbling down the mountain side.

(I.xxxviii)

The hollow murmur of the ocean-tide.

(I.xxxviii)
And a final example is seen in the oak trees that

from the stormy promontory tower,
And toss their giant arms amid the skies.

Beattie's sensitivity to natural beauty is evident in the eager anticipation and close observation in these lines. It must be emphasized that they anticipate Wordsworth more nearly than is generally acknowledged. Critics sometimes quote Wordsworth's lines on sound which note that one can hear the noise of a mountain-stream more distinctly at night. This, they claim, is evidence of a close observation first brought to English poetry by him. Yet long before Wordsworth's poem Beattie wrote of waterfalls heard from afar amid the lonely night and of the quiet evening when "naught but the torrent is heard on the hill" ("The Hermit," 1.3). Of greater significance is Beattie's doctrine that rural people, owing to their closeness to nature, have a finer sense of moral worth than the poor of a city. The Minstrel tells of the amusements that often "cheer'd the Shepherds round their social hearth," and rejoices that "Nature forms a rustic taste so nice":

Ah! had they been of court or city breed,
Such delicacy were right marvellous indeed.

This notion is generally claimed to have had its origin with Wordsworth. Clearly the development of "nature poetry" was aided and enriched by the expression of Beattie's belief in the salutary effect of nature on man and of his own enthusiastic response to nature.

These views on the significance of nature and the happy expression of some of them are really only the background for the development of Edwin's character. And he points up even more important connections between Beattie and Wordsworth. Edwin was a distinct, clearly-etched character for eighteenth-century readers. He came as a revelation to them for he gave fuller expression to many hitherto vague, and sometimes unconnected, notions about the poet that had been developing for a long time. He must have seemed imbued with new poetic life and was so life-like that Oliver Goldsmith's sister remarked on the great likeness between her brother and him.7 Like Beattie Edwin was born in a remote little village and grew to boyhood amid the simplicity of country life.

7. Abbie F. Potts, Wordsworth's Prelude: A Study of its Literary Forms (New York, 1953), p. 131. This book has the most extensive treatment of Wordsworth's indebtedness to Beattie that I have seen.
And yet poor Edwin was no vulgar boy, 
Deep thought oft seem'd to fix his infant eye. 
Dainties he heeded not, nor gaud, nor toy, 
Save one short pipe of rudest minstrelsy: 
Silent when glad; affectionate, though sly; 
And now his look was most demurely sad; 
And now he laugh'd aloud, yet none knew why. 
The neighbours stare'd and sigh'd, yet bless'd the lad: 
Some deem'd him wondrous wise, and some believe'd him mad.  
(1.xvi)

He never cared "to mingle in the clamourous fray of squabbling imps"; but retired to the forest or "the lonely mountain's head" and wandered among "deep untrodden groves" the live-long night. He was also different from ordinary boys in that he was not moved to tests of "strength, dexterity, or speed," detested blood-sports, and was convinced that "the silvan reign unbloody joy might yield." The young lad, "wrapt in wonder," roved over the countryside and was fascinated by "the precipice o'erhanging with pine" and the "foaming torrents," and enthralled as the "waters, woods, and winds" joined "in concert." He thus learned "to prize great Nature's charms." Often he "trac'd the uplands, to survey" the rising sun, and one of his favourite scenes was the view from "the craggie cliff" of the world below shrouded in mist. As he recalls and relives in imagination his happy boyhood days, Beattie concludes that Edwin was in truth "a strange and wayward wight,"

Fond of each gentle and each dreadful scene.  
In darkness, and in storm, he found delight:  
Nor less, than when on ocean wave serene  
The southern Sun diffus'd his dazzling shone.  
Even sad vicissitude amus'd his soul:  
And if a sigh would sometimes intervene,  
And down his cheek a tear of pitty roll,  
A sigh, a tear, so sweet, he wish'd not to control.  
(1.xxii)

He was a "visionary boy" who sought the solitude and melancholy of night and then dreamed

of graves and corpses pale;  
And ghosts that to the charnel dungeon throng,  
And drag a length of clanking chain, and wail.  
(1.xxxii)

Once he hied to a "haunted stream, remote from man," and there his fancy produced a vision of fairy-soldiers dancing amid "the echoing forests." The vision enthralled him, but he was quite willing to accept such joys as they were presented, and so wandered home smiling with rapture "through the scenes of morn." In winter when the "driving
snow" kept him from his beloved hills and valleys his fancy was fed with imaginative fare of another sort. Then he sat enraptured at tales of knights and feats of arms, of the "moonlight revel of the fairy glade," of witches, fiends and spectres, and enthralled by the "gentle strain" of old ballads with lilting melodies. But often when the winter storms had abated he would roam "the snowy waste at even" and would frequently make his way "to the sounding shore" and listen "with pleasing dread, to the deep roar/Of the wide-weltering waves." 8 Under the tutelage of nature and rural amusements he "scant'd with curious and romantic eye"

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{what} & \text{e'r of beautiful, or new,} \\
\text{Sublime, or dreadful, in earth, sea, or sky,} \\
\text{By chance, or search, was offer'd to his view . . .} \\
\text{What} & \text{e'r of lore tradition could supply} \\
\text{From gothic tale, or song, or fable old,} \\
\text{Rous'd him, still keen to listen and to pry.} \\
\text{At last, though long by penury control'd} \\
\text{And solitude, his soul her graces 'gan unfold.}
\end{align*}
\]

(I.lviii)

Thus ends canto I, with Edwin, the "lone enthusiast," still a boy. And thus ends Beattie's vision of his own boyhood, for canto II is to recapture very little of the nostalgic rapture and enthusiastic joys of the first. Rather Edwin's "philosophical" education is to push nature into the background. "His infant Muse" is to be refined by "time and culture" so that he may learn "elegance" and consequently support the character "of an itinerant Poet and Musician." As dignity was added to his "blooming prime" he took walks of a much "wider circuit." One day he discovered a hidden valley—the most magnificent natural scene he had encountered. As he stands on a "lonely eminence" and is

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sooth'd by the lulling sound of grove and stream,} \\
\text{Romantic visions swarm on Edwin's soul;}
\end{align*}
\]

(II.ix)

8. It should be noted that Beattie is not merely putting Edwin through "Romantic" adventures typical of the time; Beattie himself had experienced them. In a letter to the Dowager Lady Forbes on 12 October 1772 he writes:

"... I find you are willing to suppose, that, in Edwin, I have given only a picture of myself, as I was in my younger days. I confess the supposition is not groundless. I have made him take pleasure in the scenes in which I took pleasure, and entertain sentiments similar to those, of which, even in my early youth, I had repeated experience. The scenery of a mountainous country, the ocean, the sky, thoughtfulness and retirement, and sometimes melancholy objects and ideas, had charms in my eyes, even when I was a schoolboy; and at a time when I was so far from being able to express, that I did not understand my own feelings, or perceive the tendency of such pursuits and amusements." (Quoted in William Forbes, *An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie* (Edinburgh, 1807), I, 267.)
but this reverie is soon interrupted by the mournful tones of an old man's voice drifting down the valley:

Hail, awful scenes, that calm the troubled breast,
And soothe the weary to profound repose!
Can passion's wildest uproar lay to rest,
And whisper comfort to the man of woest!
Here innocence may wander, safe from foes,
And Contemplation soar on seraph wings.
O Solitude! the man who thee foregoes,
When lucre lures him, or ambition stings,
Shall never know the source whence real grandeur springs.

(II.x)

So the hermit's solemn tale unfolds as Edwin stands listening "wrapt in wonder." He had "sought for glory in the paths of guile" until "pangs of keen remorse" had made him "rue those years of trouble and debasement vile." For a long time he has sought to repent amid the solitude of nature and has found some recompense in its soothing charms. But still the old sage mourns for "virtue lost, and ruin'd man" and, contemplating the "chaos drear in the mental world," he prays for the "eternal morn" to appear:

O Thou, at whose creative smile, yet heaven,
In all the pomp of beauty, life, and light,
Rose from th' abyss; when dark Confusion, driven
Down down the bottomless profound of night.
Fled, where he ever flies thy piercing sight!
O glance on these sad shades one pitying ray,
To blast the fury of oppressive might,
Melt the hard heart to love and mercy's sway,
And cheer the wandering soul, and light him on the way!

(II.xxi)

With this Edwin is left in silence. For the first time he is troubled. He returns home, but the hermit's voice keeps reverberating in his memory. His hopes have been darkened and doubts infest his mind. Is the world, as it has always seemed to him, a place of honour, love and rapturous joys, or is it the home of deceit, corruption and disappointments, as the hermit said? Many days pass and he can contain himself no longer. He therefore seeks out the old sage to regain "the calm, contented mind" or to have his doubts confirmed. The hermit is loath at first to tell him "th' extent of human folly," for he wishes him to return to "the gay dreams of fond romantic youth." But it is too late for that; his pitiful plight is too reminiscent of the hermit's own sad fate for him to send the lad away unsatisfied. "If I one soul improve, I have not liv'd in vain," he decides and thus invites Edwin to come often to his bower where he will gain amusement, knowledge and wisdom. On
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And woo the weary to profound repose!
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subsequent visits the sage gives learned discourses on history, art, literature, the classics and the sciences. He is convinced that "Fancy enervates . . . the heart/And . . . wounds the mental sight" and thus tries to "curb Imagination's lawless rage" in Edwin. At the end of these lectures Edwin is both sadder and wiser.

But she, who set on fire his infant heart,
And all his dreams, and all his wanderings shar'd
And bless'd, the Muse, and her celestial art,
Still claim th' enthusiast's fond and first regard.
From Nature's beauties variously compar'd
And variously combin'd, he learns to frame
Those forms of bright perfection, which the bard,
While boundless hopes and boundless views inflame,
Enamour'd consecrates to never-dying fame.

(II.5vii)

Edwin's natural gift for poetic expression is disciplined by art as

he owns her charm divine,
And clearst th' ambiguous phrase, and lops th' unwieldy line;

and his lyre is "taught to modulate the artful strain." But he is never to practise the art of minstrelsy in the world, for at this point Beattie's grief over the death of a friend caused him to lay aside his own gothic lyre; when he took it up again it had lost its spell. Edwin is a lover of solitude and a dreamer who finds exquisite delight in indulging his melancholic and sentimental traits. But above all he is a pure and innocent person; a complete believer in his instinct and emotions and a devotee of nature and imagination. He is thus so unusual that he is hardly like a real boy at all; rather he represents the first stage in the "Progress of a Poetical Genius" as recollected in the poet's nostalgic and tranquil reminiscence. He is the central figure in a vision of youthful promise and his abruptly-ended existence in canto II is a comment on Beattie's limitations as poet. But in Beattie's time there were no complaints about, indeed there seems to have been little inking of, the limited vision of The Minstrel.9

John Wilson ("Christopher North") was one of the first to call attention to affinities between Beattie and Wordsworth. As early as April 1829 he had expressed his admiration for Beattie and at the same time had hinted darkly at his attack on Wordsworth to follow several years later: "Beattie was a delightful poet—that Mr. Words-

9. One of the earliest indications of the poem's limitations comes in Keats's letter to his brother George on 31 December 1818: "Mrs. Tighe and Beattie once delighted me—now I see through them and can find nothing in them but weakness and yet how many they still delight!" (Keats's Complete Poetical Works and Letters (New York, 1899), p. 345.)
worth well known." In 1838 he was much more explicit: The Excursion, he writes, is so similar to The Minstrel that Wordsworth "must thereby forego the praise of originality."

This is not the first time that the development of intellect and imagination in an humble mountain-boy has been made the subject of poetry, and of good poetry too. We have most of us read Beattie's Minstrel, and some of us may return to that poem even after reading the Excursion, without feeling much disenchantment of the old charm which it exerted over us. Nay, the Minstrel may give us greater pleasure than ever from our considering it as the original of so admirable an imitation.

Wilson feels that Wordsworth has followed the poem so closely that an acknowledgement of the source of The Excursion is required. To support his point he makes a comparison between some aspects of the two poems:

The two stories coincide in almost every particular. The country, Scotland—the locality, a mountainous district—the youth's profession, pastoral—the forms of nature represented as the means of exciting and spiritualizing his mind—and the aim of it all to illustrate 'the pursuit of knowledge under difficulty'.

He then inserts a passage from each poem and asks the reader to compare them and decide

whether the balance of praise may not be held pretty equally between them, considering, at least, that the last one quoted was the first written. . . . In these two quotations we cannot help seeing a resemblance both in the general purpose and in the individual pictures, particularly in that of the setting sun. . . . consider that the Excursion is, in its general plan, a vindication of those very principles of hope and faith which Beattie so well inculcated in his Minstrel before a French Revolution had occurred to frighten him into them. . .

The two poems are similar, but of much greater interest is the indication in Wilson's remarks of a critical attitude which existed while The Minstrel was still a well-known poem. His praise is too high; the poem was greatly overrated in its own time. But it needs to be noted that its almost total eclipse since then belies the modest credit it deserves.

There is evidence that the poem had more than a superficial effect on Wordsworth's development. Some of his juvenile poems show plainly that he was to a large extent dependent upon it for inspiration. During the period that he was engaged on these poems, his sister

11. Ibid., XLIV (October 1838), 512-514.
Dorothy had not seen him for some time. Late in the summer of 1793, when he was twenty-three years old, she wrote to her friend Jane Pollard concerning him:

In truth he was a strange and wayward wight,
Fond of each gentle, etc. etc. . . .

That verse of Beattie’s Minstrel always reminds me of him, and indeed the whole character of Edwin resembles much what William was when I first knew him, after leaving Halifax.13

Wordsworth himself could not have been unaware of this likeness, and perhaps it entered into his conversations with Dorothy and Coleridge, possibly even prompting these later remarks from Coleridge: “. . . I was rather surprised to hear him speak so well of . . . Beattie’s Minstrel . . . Wordsworth seemed to be endeavouring to direct my taste towards the best models in our language.”14 It will be shown that he quite consciously used The Minstrel as a model in some of his early poems and that it played a seminal role in the writing of The Prelude. Beattie’s “lone enthusiast” figures prominently in Wordsworth’s early life. As Coleridge indicates, he must have seen in him a sort of contemporary, “perhaps not as many years older than himself, surrounded by the same circumstances, and disciplined by the same manners.”14 Edwin must often have seemed to Wordsworth to be expressing his own inmost thoughts and feelings. As F. W. Bateson suggests, it “is not impossible that William at this time was to some extent modelling himself on Beattie’s hero.”15 In 1802 Wordsworth wrote a poetic portrait of himself in his copy of Thomson’s The Castle of Indolence. This portrait of the youthful Wordsworth, “wedded to verse,” bears a striking resemblance to Edwin:

Thus often would he leave our peaceful home,
And find elsewhere his business or delight;
Out of our Valley’s limits did he roam:
Full many a time, upon a stormy night,
His voice came to us from the neighbouring height:
Oft could we see him driving full in view
At mid-day when the sun was shining bright;
What ill was on him, what he had to do,
A mighty wonder bred among our quiet crew.

And his own mind like a tempest strong
Came to him thus, and drove the weary wight along.

(10-36)

15. Ibid.
Neither Wordsworth nor Edwin was a man of the world, for each was "a strange and wayward wight." Wordsworth was clearly fascinated by Edwin and influenced by him in his love of communing with nature in solitude and youthful ecstasy.

Wordsworth's love for *The Minstrel* and its effect on him are indicated in some of his remarks. Coleridge's friendship and Dorothy's constant aid helped to avert the breakdown which was imminent because of his great disillusionment over the French Revolution. During this crisis he returned to his two earlier studies, mathematics and poetry, in an effort to regain his slipping stability. There is evidence that at this time he yearned for his old favourite, *The Minstrel*, for it seemed to symbolize the joyous experiences he had had with poetry before abandoning it temporarily. On the morning of 23 October 1795 he walked over the hills of Lyme to see an old friend; the sights and sounds along the way brought back memories of the poem. That night he wrote to another friend, telling him of the pleasures of his walk and hinting at his need to be reunited with Edwin, his imaginary companion of years earlier:

> My walk over the hills was charming. I could hear the murmuring of the sea for three miles, of course I often stopped 'listening with pleasing dread to the deep roar of the wide wailing waves.' This is from the Minstrel and has reminded me of a request I have to make to you, which is that you would accept of my edition of Caro's Letters, and in return make me a present of that Vol. of Bell's forgotten poetry which contains The Minstrel . . . I know you are possessed of it; so was I once, but one of my brothers lent it to a person who valued it so highly as to deny himself the pleasure of returning it."

It seems that Wordsworth returned to the poem to renew past pleasure and to find inspiration. And this was not the first time that he had sought its aid. His *juvenilia* of some years earlier shows its influence as well as the kinship between William and Edwin.

Emil Legouis was one of the first critics to note the great similarity between Edwin and William. In a study of *The Prelude*, he claims that Wordsworth "contracted the cherished complaint" of melancholy from Beattie: "... it was left to Beattie to proclaim frankly the identity of poetry and melancholy, and to lay a ban upon those unacquainted with so divine and delicious a sentiment."17 *An Evening Walk*, begun in 1787 and published in 1793, is a good example of the derivative quality of Wordsworth's melancholic treatment of nature.

It has long been regarded as a deliberate collection of adaptations from the landscape poets with most of the borrowings indicated in footnotes. It is largely in imitation of *The Minstrel*, celebrating the sounds of evening as the earlier poem deals with those of morning, and thus containing many echoes of it. Beattie's line, "And from embattled clouds emerging slow," becomes "And shades of deep embattl'd clouds were seen." Wordsworth writes: "Downward the ponderous timber-wain resounds" and 'Hurrying the feeding hare thro' rustling corn." Beattie had written:

Down the rough slope the ponderous wagon rings;
Thro' rustling corn the hare astonished springs.

Wordsworth acknowledged part of his debt here by pointing out in a footnote that he had imitated one of these lines. Such notations indicate that the borrowings were deliberate and that he was paying tribute to poets who had inspired him. Thus *An Evening Walk* shows clear traces of *The Minstrel* on his early development.

*Descriptive Sketches*, written in 1791-2 and published in 1793, bears a marked resemblance to *The Minstrel*. The description of "Urseren's open vale setene," for instance, as

Her quiet streams, and hills of downy green
Plunge with the Russ embrown'd by Terror's breath,

is similar to Beattie's "melodious, pure, and cool" rill and the river thundering "down the Vale," while

th' unsightly slime and sluggish pool
Have all the solitary Vale imbrown'd.

Wordsworth's poem has a description of a morning scene in which a valley filled with mist is viewed from a high hill and which is almost identical to an episode in *The Minstrel*. This very episode is quite prominent in a small notebook of Christopher Wordsworth to which William had added a few entries. The notebook, first published in 1958, is a tiny volume of only a few pages, containing references to poems by name, copies of certain poetic passages, and outlines of related poetic themes. The passages are numbered and "the grouping of [the notations] . . . suggests that the numbers were added later and that their purpose was to assist the writer in locating entries containing materials on certain poetic themes in which he was interested."18 *The Minstrel* is referred to specifically three times. A typical entry reads:

Gilpime
Description of the mists Beattie's Mists.
Winter. Snow, sleet. rain. storm
Ice. etc. Storm description of . . .

Two of the citations indicating the poem refer to the theme of mists; another entry begins: "Morning Mist. [not the elaborate description]. Descriptive Sketches contains the realization of such an "elaborate description" (292-511) and the notebook seems to suggest that it is based on Beattie's stanza. The notebook, Descriptive Sketches and The Minstrel have many things in common: winter evenings spent listening to legends and fairy tales, thoughtful considerations on the transitory nature of human happiness, praise of the ascetic life, stories of rural tragedies, musings on knowledge, popular superstitions, hidden valleys, echoes, deer, night scenes, storms, mists and visions of soldiers. All three seem to be attempts to characterize the very common themes of melancholy and sentimentality of the late eighteenth century. At the time that Christopher was compiling his notebook and later when William wrote Descriptive Sketches, The Minstrel was the most popular poem of the type. Thus we find Christopher reproducing also stanzas xxxv and xxxvi, canto I—the description of the dance of the fairy-soldiers. This reproduction seems to indicate an influence on the vision of soldiers in Wordsworth's poem. The presence of Beattie's poem in the poet's mind is even more clearly indicated in his using Beattie's vision of soldiers for a similar scene in An Evening Walk: "the Genii hold their state" (258), "the pageant scene vanishes" (360) and "The pomp is fled" (359), an obvious adoption of the way Beattie ends Edwin's vision ("The dream is fled"). It is evident from the notebook then that Christopher's plans were greatly influenced by Beattie. There can be little doubt in fact that the notebook contains the outline of Descriptive Sketches; its entries thus show that Wordsworth in part influenced by his brother deliberately called upon passages in The Minstrel to aid his compositions.

The Vale of Esthwaite, written in 1787 when Wordsworth was seventeen, has even closer affinities with The Minstrel. It was written about the time that Dorothy first saw the similarity between Edwin and William; William's own account of its genesis, written years later, indicates the closeness of its theme to that of Beattie's poem: "... I wrote, while yet a schoolboy, a long poem running upon my own adventures and the scenery of the country in which I was brought up." In publishing the poem for the first time in 1940 de Selincourt men-

19. Ibid., p. 79.
tions several echoes of *The Minstrel*; but it contains more than borrow-
ings of phrase and image. It also has similar persons, themes, adventures
and settings. Edwin and William are solitary wanderers over very simi-
lar landscapes; the settings of both poems being combinations of
memories and impressions of real and literary experience. *The Minstrel*
can be seen as a catalytic agent in Wordsworth's reaction to his school-
boy adventures amid country scenery. A good example of the working
of this influence is Beattie's description of what Helen Darbishire calls
his "gloomy dreaming":

> There would be dream of graves, and corses pale:
> And ghosts that to the charnel dungeon throng,
> And drag a length of clanking chain, and wail,
> Till silence'd by the owl's terrific song,
> Or blast that shrieks by fits the shuddering isles along.
>

(1xxxii)

In *The Vale of Esthwaite* this becomes:

> And oft as ceased the owl his song
> That screamed the roofless walls among,
> Spirits yelling from their pains
> And lashes loud, and clanking chains,
> Were heard by minstrel led astray
> Cold wandering thro' the swampy way.
>

(51-6)

Wordsworth's imaginative experience of nature seems to have been so
affected by *The Minstrel* that he saw parallels between it and Edwin's
activities. Edwin with his lyre and the old hermit with his harp beside
him are the counterparts of Wordsworth's "tall, thin Spectre" with
"poet's harp of yore." The hermit's "lamentable strain" finds an echo
in the old bard's "dismal song" and Wordsworth's images of "aisles
that shuddered as we pass'd" and a "Gothic mansion" seem direct copies
of Beattie's "shuddering isles" and "gothic dome." Beattie rebukes
sophists and schoolmen and warns that to succumb to their wiles is to
"delve for life in Mammon's dirty mine," while Wordsworth fears he
will have "to delve in Mammon's joyless mine." But Edwin and William
remain for a time unaffected by Mammon. Beattie is eager that Edwin
should indulge "gay hope, and fancy's pleasing fire," for "Fancy and
hope too soon shall of themselves expire": Wordsworth has a premoni-
tion concerning "fond sickly Fancy's toys" early in the poem, but seems

the Romantic poets passed through this phase of "gloomy dreaming" which
they contracted largely from Beattie. It is also worth noting that the mode
continued with Sir Walter Scott, especially in *Marmion*, the *Lady of the Lake*
and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. 
to recover later: "Compared with fancy what is truth? / And Reason, what art thou to Youth?"

Edwin and William have comparable evening adventures. Edwin wanders "down the Vale ... lighted by the evening star, / Lingering and listening;" but soon "the setting Moon" hangs "o'er the dark and melancholy deep" as he lies to "haunted stream, remote from man." There under "the vault of night" he sees a fanciful vision of fairy-soldiers dancing as "long-rob'd minstrels wake the warbling wire." "While lighted by the star of eve," William wanders through "Grasmere's heavenly vale"; but soon the moon retires and "the wide vault dark and blind" is "blacken'd round." As the storm rages, he sees a vision of a Baron and many demonic forms:

A tall thin Spectre seem'd to stand
Like two wan wither'd leaves his eyes

And on one branded arm he bore
What seem'd the poet's harp of yore.

(328-335)

The visions end at sunrise as both minstrels are called back to the sights and sounds of day. Edwin passes "through the scenes of morn" and William wanders by the "dear hills" and "Winander's darling tide."

Edwin is soon to be dismayed by the hermit's historical account of the world's folly and thus to desire to forsake worldly cares to go "where Love and Fancy lead." But the hermit warns that "Fancy enervates ... the heart and ... wounds the mental sight" and suggests that philosophy and science be pursued instead, for they reveal truth. So through "Nature's beauties variously compar'd / And variously combin'd" Edwin begins to "meditate on Heaven"; and thereby forsakes the world of men, for the poem ends here. But William tries to take the minstrel's "studies" further, and his method of beginning, as seen in MS.B, offers proof of his following Beattie's lead. The MS., the basis of The Vale of Esthwaite, is a collection of extracts with various headings, "Pity, Hope, Sentiments of Affection for inanimate Nature, Evening Sounds." At the beginning of the MS., Wordsworth had copied two lines from the conclusion of The Minstrel:

Adieu, ye lays, that Fancy's flowers adorn,
The soft amusement of the vacant mind!

His own lines, following on, show grave concern with the difficult role of the poet in coping with life—a notion placed before him in the unfinished state of Beattie's "Progress of Genius":

What though my grief must never flow
For scenes of visionary woe?
I trust the Bard can never part
With Pity . . .

(137-140)

The rest of the extracts express the trust that the bard can never part from hope, or charity, or affection for nature. By copying Beattie's lines of farewell to poetry, Wordsworth is clearly indicating his intention to sing a higher theme—a task which was to occupy him for almost the rest of his life and to reach fruition in *The Prelude*, the expression of the growth of his own mind. But he did not immediately leave *The Minstrel* behind as the MS. shows. Beattie has suggested that "sympathy divine" and "friendship's flame" should be very important in human relationships; Wordsworth is moved to write:

While bounteous heaven shall Fleming leave,
Of Friendship what can me bereave?
Till then shall live thy holy flame,
Friendship and Fleming are the same.

(542-5)

Thereafter his minstrel is taken into the cruel world of superstition and terror and shown that there fancy shoots "like the lightning gleam/ . . . from wondrous dream to dream." He is then rescued by the saving grace of love from the

forms of Fear that float
Wild on the shipwreck of the thought
While fancy in a Demon's form
Rises through the clouds and swells the storm.

(546-9)

Thus the young minstrel sees the possibility in human experience of the reconciliation and union of reason and love. Beattie's problem of making Edwin into a professional minstrel is nearer to solution and will be tackled much more convincingly in *The Prelude*. Two facts emerge from the account of the echoes of *The Minstrel* in Wordsworth's early poems and emphasize their significance. At the time of writing there was a remarkable likeness between William and Edwin—a similarity which could not fail to influence Wordsworth's reflections. The poems themselves deal with the central problem of his life, the search for his own poetic identity. The search led him along the path first followed by Edwin and the solution of the problem was found in terms of the modification and enrichment of Edwin's minstrelsy.

*The Prelude* is a much richer expression of the youthful experiences in *The Vale of Esthwaite*, for it is essentially the story of the mature reconciliation of reason and love, of Wordsworth's learning to speak
truth, as Beattie writes, "from the lips of love." It thus shows Edwin as he might have grown up. It is remarkable that The Minstrel forms as integral and important a part of it as of The Vale. In fact parts of The Vale have found their way into The Prelude in typical Wordsworthian modified form. "It is characteristic of Wordsworth that the experience of his fourteenth year . . . was turned to poetry two years later, [in The Vale] and again, when he came to write The Prelude in 1799." 22 This shows a clearly established link between it and The Minstrel.

The design, aim and scope of both poems are very similar. The "Advertisement" to canto II of The Minstrel (1771) has been called "Beattie's Wordsworthian Preface," 23 a comparison with the "Preface" to The Excursion (1814) reveals the accuracy of that statement. Both poems are only the first parts of much longer works which were planned but never finished and both are autobiographical. The Minstrel is "to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius" and The Prelude is to show the "growth of a poet's Mind." One might say that Wordsworth's "Preface" is an expanded version of Beattie's "Advertisement." Beattie's plan is to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude and illiterate age, from the first dawning of fancy and reason, till that period at which he may be supposed capable of supporting the character of A MINSTREL, that is, of an itinerant poet and musician—a character which, according to the notions of our forefathers, was not only respectable, but sacred. 24

Wordsworth's version is remarkably similar:

Several years ago, when the Author retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them . . . the result of the investigation . . . was a determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views on Man, Nature, and Society; and to be entitled, The Recluse; as having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement. —The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were suf-

Wordsworth and Beattie both encounter philosophy, science, nature, books and truth on their poetical journeys. Edwin and William face the same problem of being a poet among men and are thus much alike. Perhaps the most characteristic trait common to them is the joy each gets from the extremes of nature. Sights both mild and terrible delight them; Edwin is fond “of each gentle and each dreadful scene” and William, having had those very words applied to him by Dorothy, writes often of the contrast between “grandeur and tumult,” nature’s “two-fold influence” which gives rise to both “emotions” and “moods of calmness.” He and Edwin were learning the same craft so that Wordsworth has done much more fully for his own poetical mind what Beattie had tried to do for his “imaginary” poet.

The publication of the MSS of The Prelude by de Selincourt (1926) has enabled one to trace closely the poem’s development.28 These MSS reveal a greater dependence on The Minstrel than the published version (1850) indicates. The Prelude’s origin may be traced to 1788, the poet’s second year at Cambridge, for it was then that he had his first desire to write an important poem:

The Poet’s soul was with me at that time,
    . . . Those were the days
Which also first encourag’d me to trust
With firmness, hitherto but lightly touch’d
With such a daring thought, that I might leave
Some monument behind me which pure hears
Should reverence.

(VI.55-69)

It was during this time that William’s “whole character” greatly resembled Edwin’s. It therefore seems a sound conjecture that Wordsworth’s “daring thought” was inspired by the hope of carrying further Beattie’s vision of a poet on the path to truth. But there was to be a long time between the hope and its realization. MSJJ (1798-9), the earliest extant draft, containing much of Book I and two parts of later books, seems to be the first coherent attempt at composition. It contains several reminiscences of childhood experiences with nature and its agonizing theme—did nature educate me to be a poet who must fail in his mission?—is clearly a reiteration of Edwin’s dilemma—“I long, where Love and Fancy lead, to go.” It seems that Wordsworth’s desire


to be reunited with Edwin, expressed in the letter of 23 October 1795, is bearing fruit, perhaps even to the extent of prompting him into beginning to explore his qualifications as poet. In fact, if de Selincourt’s conjecture is correct, the first lines of the poem were written on his way to Racedown in 1795 and later reworked in 1804 to become lines 1-54 of Book 1.27 These celebrate his release from London and find in the gentle wind a "corresponding mild creative breeze":

A vital breeze which travell’d gently on  
O’er things which it had made, and is become  
A tempest, a redundant energy  
Vexing its own creation.

(44-7)

MS.71 shows him still preoccupied with this perplexity and still convinced of his poetic destiny:

Nor while, thou (gh) doubting yet not lost, I tread  
The mazes of this argument, and paint  
How Nature by collateral interest  
And by extrinsic passion peopled first  
My mind with beauteous objects may I well  
Forget what might demand a loftier song.

(570-5)

*The Minstrel*, a constant reminder to Wordsworth of the need to sing "a loftier song," may be claimed to have helped the awakening of the creative spirit within him. But Beattie’s poem, also "Vexing its own creation," gives no hint of a sound method of proceeding to a higher theme. *MS.18a*, a notebook compiled sometime in 1799-1800, contains much of Book I of *The Prelude* and an abortive beginning headed 2nd Part. It seems, as de Selincourt claims, that composition ceased at the end of Book I and that Wordsworth was "in danger of playing truant to the whole enterprise."28 Sometime within the next eleven months he returned to the poem, wrote the second book, made fair copies of both books between January and October 1800 and then abandoned the poem until 1804. These two books cover approximately the same period of development as the two cantos of *The Minstrel*. Wordsworth did not seem to be making much headway with the exploration of the effect of nature and education on his ability to write poetry. But his activities during this respite from the investigation show that he was nevertheless still struggling with poetic problems. For he was then engaged in producing *Lyrical Ballads*—a clear indication that he was aware of the importance of attempting something new. And even here there are

27. Ibid., p. xlviii.
28. Ibid. p. xlvii.
signs of the closeness of his development to Edwin's. *Lyrical Ballads* in part resembles the legends, heroic songs and stories of country life Edwin hears from his mother. Beattie writes in a footnote that Edwin listens to the old ballad, "The Children of the Wood" (l.xvi), and Wordsworth discusses it in the "Preface" to his work. Meanwhile, he looks for inspiration to Chaucer, Spenser and Milton as Beattie intended in canto III to send Edwin to study Virgil, Homer and the art of minstrelsy. It seems the main reason Wordsworth did not return to his poem for a time was that he had not yet seen the proper path out of the dilemma left him by Beattie. Beattie had regarded his old hermit highly; but he could not supply enough wisdom to allow him properly to prepare Edwin for professional minstrelsy. But The Minstrel does show the polarity of the problem in the figures of Edwin, the youthful enthusiast, and the hermit, the old sage. Somehow the natural talent of the minstrel must be controlled and shaped by the wisdom of the sage. Beattie's influence here is seen in Wordsworth's adoption of both figures—he himself becomes Edwin grownup in *The Prelude* and the hermit is prominent in several places, such as *The Ruined Cottage* (The Pedlar) and *The Excursion* (The Solitary). One may claim that Coleridge played the role of sage to Wordsworth's minstrel in suggesting the composition of a long philosophical poem, *The Prelude* shows the minstrel learning truth and wisdom through the discipline and inspiration of art. Beattie's hermit was wrong in warning Edwin that "Fancy enervates . . . the heart/And . . . wounds the mental sight," as Wordsworth realizes when he sees how his "Love of Nature" had led to "Love of Man" and can thus contradict him in considering his "Imagination and Taste, how Impaired and Restored." In a word, the progress of genius of Beattie's poem is fulfilled in the growth of Wordsworth's mind, for the two imaginative stories both tend towards the progress of poesy.

With the completion of the first two books in 1800, Wordsworth was no closer to a solution of the dilemma than Beattie had been when he published canto II in 1774 and later destroyed an unsatisfactory third canto and abandoned his poem for ever. MSS. W, X and Y show that Wordsworth returned to his poem in January 1804 and made rapid progress with it, writing Book III, starting Book IV and planning to complete the poem in Book V. MS. W., a notebook of January-March, contains Book IV in rough form, several passages now in Books V, XI and XIII, and the beginning of the proposed final book headed *5th Book*. This start was the episode on Mount Snowden and was to introduce the conclusion of his consideration of the all-important theme of

imagination. But the attempt to follow this plan soon made him realize that he must extend the scope and scale of the poem; thus M.S.A, de Selincourt's basic source (1805), shows the new plans put into effect after 6 March.

M.S.W. is therefore the record of an important stage of development and is remarkable for its reliance on The Minstrel. The first passage has a clear statement of the problem: the poet must regain "that religious dignity of mind,/That is the very faculty of truth" (IV. 297-8). Beattie's hermit desired that Edwin might "in peace return/To the gay dreams of fond romantic youth,"

When Fancy roam'd through Nature's works at will,
Uncheck'd by cold distrust, and uninform'd of ill.

(II.xxix)

The M.S. shows Wordsworth recalling his own "primitive hours" and dwelling on one particular incident. He had passed a "night in dancing, gaiety and mirth" with many people and makes his way home at sunrise:

... the sky was bright with day.
... Magnificent
The morning was, a memorable pomp,
More glorious than I ever had beheld.
The Sea was laughing at a distance; all
The solid Mountains were as bright as clouds,
Grain-tinted, drench'd in empyrean light;
And, in the meadows and the lower grounds,
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn,
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
And Labourers going forth into the fields.

(IV.328-339)

Edwin had often

trac'd the uplands, to survey
When o'er the sky advance'd the kindling dawn,
The crimson cloud, blue main, and mountain gray,
And lake, dim gleaming on the smoky lawn:
Far to the west the long long vale withdrawn,
Where twilight loves to linger for a while;
And now he faintly kens the bounding fawn,
And villager abroad at early toil.
But, lo! the Sun appears! and heaven, earth, ocean, smile.

(1.xx)

The similarities of scene, experience and expression point up Wordsworth's indebtedness here; his passage is a combination of recollections from his own experience and from Beattie. The Minstrel thus helped him to realize that he "should be . . . a dedicated Spirit" and walk
on in "blessedness" (IV.343-5). His recreation of this mystic experience helps him towards a realization of "the very faculty of truth" which brings back his "religious dignity of mind." This is reiterated a little further on in the MS. in a passage which later found a place in Book XI. In it he seems to give faint praise to The Minstrel in speaking of the "milder minstrelsy of rural scenes" and following on:

I had felt
Too forcibly, too early in my life,
Visitations of imaginative power
For this to last: I shook the habit off
Entirely and for ever, and again
In Nature's presence stood, as I stand now,
A sensitive, and a creative Soul.

(XI.251-7)

Granted this is a statement about the poem's main theme—the retardation and restoration of his imagination and taste—yet one senses that The Minstrel is also involved. Thereafter in the MS. one notes a much more questioning, probing attitude than Beattie's, but yet significant similarities still emerge. Both poets, for instance, deal with the inevitability of death: Beattie grieves over "majestic Man" (Lxv) and Wordsworth mourns, "O Man,/Thou paramount Creature" (V.1-4). Wordsworth is preoccupied with the survival of the "consecrated works of Bard and Sage" (V.41) and bemoans the fact that the mind's "spirit" is lodged "in shrines so frail" (V.48). Beattie asks, "Shall I be left forgotten in the dust,/When Fate, relenting, lets the flower revive?" (Lxvii). Both poets speak of revival in terms of nature's cycles. Wordsworth writes of immortality as "the living Presence still" subsisting "Victorious" despite the destruction of the world: "and composure would ensue,/And kindlings like the morning pressge sure,/Though slow, perhaps, of a returning day." (V.33-6). Beattie writes:

... Heaven's immortal spring shall yet arrive,
And man's majestic beauty bloom again,
Bright through th' eternal year of Love's triumphant reign.

(Lxxvii)

After the heading 5th Book in the MS., Wordsworth deals with the experience on Mount Snowdon above the mist in the moonlight—the well-known episode that now begins Book XIII (1-135). One is struck by the resemblance of this scene to one of Edwin's experiences—the same experience Wordsworth had used years earlier as the basis for some lines in Descriptive Sketches. Both poets describe the view from an eminence of a huge sea of mist enshrouding all except protruding
Both indicate the effect of the experience on the imagination: Beattie exclaims, "What dreadful pleasure!" and Wordsworth sees it as nature's "Soul, the Imagination of the whole." Beattie hears "the voice of . . . waterfalls" rebounding and Wordsworth the "voice of waters" as "torrents" roar "with one voice." Beattie's reaction to this solitary, "dreadful" experience is to be overawed, standing "sublime/Like shipwreck'd mariner on desert coast." Wordsworth, in his well-known statement about the function of imagination, recaptures the scene in memory as the "perfect image of a mighty Mind." Both poets have caught in their recollections the grandeur and solitariness that Wordsworth saw in the statue of Newton at Cambridge:

The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.

(III.62-3).

Through the mystic experience of nature on Snowden Wordsworth begins to be informed by his imagination:

Oh! who is he thast hath his whole life long
Preserved, enlarged this freedom in himself?
For this alone is genuine Liberty.

(XIII.120-3)

The Minstrel contains many statements about the nature of liberty or freedom. Amid the peacefulness and purity of nature, Beattie writes, "freedom fires the soul" (I.xvi) and the hermit says that the wise and good value highly "truth and liberty" (II.xiii). The crux of Edwin's problem is seen in the question he asks the hermit: "Can selfishness the liberal heart control?" (II.xxxviii). The old sage answers that "virtue is the child of liberty,/And happiness of virtue" (II.xxxi)—a doctrine which is central in The Prelude, for example, "spots of time" retaining a "Vivifying Virtue . . . by which pleasure is enhanced" (XII.260-267). For Beattie "Love's triumphant reign" is the source of all "beauty, virtue, truth . . . and melody." Wordsworth states emphatically:

From love, for here
Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,
All truth and beauty, from pervading love,
That gone, we are as dust.

(XIII.149-152)

Beattie joins with his hermit to warn that the man who renounces the "boundless store of [Nature's] charms" (I.ix) will "never know the source whence real grandeur springs" (II.x) and therefore cannot "hope

30. Beattie's stanza (I.xxi) has also been cited by E. H. Coleridge, on the authority of M. Darmesteter, as the probable model for stanza xxv, canto ii, of Byron's Childe Harold.
to be forgiven” (Lix). But the reward for those who accept nature as their inspiration and guide is great: “How sweet the words of Truth breath’d from the lips of Love” (II.iii).

At this point in MS, Wordsworth is very near to a solution to the problem bequeathed him by Beattie. He needs to explore more fully the “faculty” which has delivered him from the deadening influence of the world’s woe and folly and to work out its application to poetic development. His solution is to be the creation of great poetry out of the materials turned into adequate poetry by Beattie. The remainder of the MS, rejected from the poem by Wordsworth and first published by de Selincourt, has a tentative outline of episodes and illustrations which seems an attempt to crystallize his doctrine of the poet’s art as affected by nature. He starts by saying that he has often examined the analogy between the “mind of man and nature” which had first come to him on Mount Snowden and had inspired many similar images and ideas. The central passage of his selection is reminiscent of another of Edwin’s adventures. In common are a traveller, mist, darkness, showers, sunlight, giant waves, clouds, mountains, crags and a valley. As Edwin looks on, the “rainbow brightens to the setting Sun” (Lxxx) and as Wordsworth views “a large unmutilated rainbow,”

With a colossal stride bridging the vale,
The substance thin as dreams, lovelier than day,
(24-7)

each minstrel is enjoying the same exhilarating pleasure. But each is an essentially melancholy person and thus enjoys the storm before the rainbow. Edwin responds to the “sad vicissitude” of nature and delights in the mournful howling of the storm as “the dead foliage flies in many a shapeless flake” (Lxxiii). Wordsworth finds pleasure in the autumn “fierce with storm” with its roaring wind, mist and “bewilder’d showers” and its “Green leaves . . . rent in handfuls from the trees” (13-16).

It seems that this abortive attempt to explore his imaginative faculty was discarded because he was still relying too heavily on The Minstrel as a model. The last passage of the rejected part of the MS is a cry of woe modelled on the hermit’s lament over the “chaos drear . . . in the mental world” (II.xx) and Beattie’s complaint about the “penury, disease, and storm” which plague the poet (II.iv). Thus Wordsworth writes of the “unremitting warfare from the first/Waged with this faculty” bringing on increase

Of petty duties and degrading cares—
Labour and penury, disease and grief.
(1-7)
The rejection of these passages shows the futility in such an attempt to answer the vocation of poet. But it is clear that Wordsworth's reliance on The Minstrel has largely enabled him to make this realization, inspiring in part the great symbolic episodes of his dedication to nature at dawn, the revelation of Snowden above the mist in the moonlight, and the rejected account of the storm over Coniston. The drawing together of these episodes and other recollections of The Minstrel seems an attempt to characterize the role of nature in his spiritual rebirth. It is significant that Edwin's adventures are recorded in stanzas immediately before and after the stanza which Dorothy had seen as a description of her brother. Edwin lives on in Wordsworth's mind as a kind of alter ego which at once informs and impedes the imaginative progress of the poet's art. Yet a short time after he finished with MS.W., other MSS show that he had formulated much wider plans for the poem. It is plain that his own inner life, supported by his own experiences, with nature, was beginning to give unity and coherence to his efforts.

But he had not thereby satisfied the need to recall Beattie's vision of a poet confounded by the circumstances of his life. This is seen in MS.Y., a notebook written in the autumn of 1804 and containing the first draft of Book VIII (Retrospect. Love of Nature leading to Love of Man). Canto I of The Minstrel rejoices in nature's supremacy in every charm, but canto II shows the negation of this doctrine, pointing to art, industry and science for inspiration in the perfecting of the art of poetry. The Prelude is a reworking of Beattie's hymn to nature with all its possibilities fully realized. Wordsworth learned to throw "the habit off Entirely and for ever" and to stand again in "Nature's presence . . . A meditative and creative Soul." The poem is thus the affirmation of what Beattie knew by instinct in canto I and also the reversal of the negative conclusions he was forced into in canto II by sheer lack of insight. MS.Y. shows him beginning to comprehend the great paradox of his early experiences—that the ecstatic joy in nature which seemed to divorce him from man was really helping him to move closer to understanding man. But the MS. is much more remarkable for the part which Wordsworth rejected from the poem. This passage, unpublished till de Selincourt's edition, is a rough summary of Book VIII and shows that The Minstrel was still in his mind. Similarities abound: the seasons, moonlight, birds, flowers, echoes, forests, fish, stars, lightning, thunder, snow, hail, great storms, God, valleys, pure skies, formidable hills, precipices, desert wastes, glittering clouds,

31. It was Coleridge who remarked "that the title [of The Minstrel] ought to have been the Decay of Genius, instead of the Progress of Genius." Quoted in The Complete Works of William Hazlitt (London, 1932), XI, 373.
tender sympathies and the roaring ocean. Other lines of the MS. seem to recall The Minstrel more closely. Both have an enormous snake, a little rill, a great river, toys, a rainbow, babes-in-arms, fairies and fairy-lore, spirits in armour, giant shapes, dancing spirits, and bright tapers illuminating the gloom of night. Still other parts of the MS. show great reliance on The Minstrel. Beattie begins the poem with, "Who can tell how hard it is to climb the Steep," and Wordsworth echoes, "Who can tell while he this [?] path/Hath been ascending" (214-5). Wordsworth's "plumes" and "peacock's fan" correspond to Beattie's "peacock's plumes" and his "objects of fear" and "Nature's unfathomable work" are like "each dreadful scene" and "Nature's... charms" which show "all the dread magnificence of Heaven." Both poets have "attestations" from the world of "fable and romance," with Wordsworth's trees "that bear gems for fruit" recalling Beattie's "Chilean mountains" glowing with "gems" and the "echoing forests" blazing with "gems." Beattie's "microscope of metaphysic lore" is used again in Wordsworth's "optic tube of thought" and "the glass of Galileo," Beattie's "transcripts" of "History" and "archetypes of sublime imitation" seem to have inspired the following:

... 'tis not here
Record of what hath been, is now no more,
Nor secondary work of mimic skill,
Transcripts that do but mock their archetypes;
But primary and independent life,
No glimmering residue of splendor past,
Things in decline or faded.

(183-9)

Some lines on another page of the MS. meant to replace part of this passage prove the debt: "And imitations are not here that mock/Their archetypes..."

It seems clear that the rejected part of MS.Y. is an outline of the growth of Wordsworth's mind through infancy and boyhood, combining Edwin's experiences with memories of his own. As Wordsworth thus contemplates his first retrospective view of his "Progress of Genius," he indicates his debt to The Minstrel. He finds himself so dependent upon it for the account of his early development that he must set it aside, for Edwin's song no longer haunts him with its message of unfulfilled promise.

Long time hath Man's unhappiness and guilt
Detain'd us, with what dismal sights beset
For the outward view, and inwardly oppressed
With sorrow, disappointment, vexing thoughts,
Confusion of opinion, zeal decay'd,
And lastly, utter loss of hope itself,  
And things to hope for. Not with these began  
Our Song, and not with these our Song must end.  
(XI.1-8)

He goes on to sing "a loftier song" and thereby takes his place with the great English poets. The Prelude therefore indicates his true ancestors as he himself notes in a letter to a friend:

When I began to give myself up to the profession of a poet for life, I was impressed with a conviction, that there were four poets whom I must have continually before me as examples—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton. These I must study, and equal, if I could: I need not think of the rest."38

Despite the wisdom in his conviction, it seems that hindsight led him to ignore his debt to Beattie. It is plain that for a long time he thought, and could not help thinking, a great deal about The Minstrel — an experience which forced him to face the problems of the poetic art and resolve them. The Prelude shows the growth and maturing of the minstrel's art and as such it echoes the song of Wordsworth's youth, Beattie's hymn to nature. It is remarkable that Beattie's poem is such a seedbed of poetic "Genius" and that it helped the fruition of the poet's art in the growth of Wordsworth's mind. The effect of The Minstrel on Wordsworth has two-fold significance. It shows the poem to be better and more important than has been acknowledged and demonstrates how deeply Wordsworth's roots were sunk into an area from which he is largely claimed to have cut himself off. His development was obviously much more evolutionary than revolutionary.

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