James Beattie's "Verses occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Mr Charles Churchill" (1765) and the Demise of Augustan Satire

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E. H. KING

James Beattie’s “Verses occasioned by the
Death of the Rev’d Mr Charles Churchill”
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James Beattie’s poetic satire on Charles Churchill has been noted in modern criticism only by the very few writers who show an interest in Churchill. In 1927 J. M. Beatty dismissed the poem by quoting ten lines “to indicate the scurrilous tone of the whole,”¹ while Douglas Grant’s only comment on Beattie in his “Introduction” to the Oxford edition of Churchill’s poems (1956) notes that he “attacked [the proposal to erect a monument to Churchill in Westminster Abbey] in some verses, which he rightly omitted from his collected works.”² Meanwhile in 1953 in the only full-scale life of Churchill, W. C. Brown names Beattie’s poem as his example of the most extreme attacks on Churchill in the age and quotes two lines from it.³ Thus one gets the impression that the poem is worthy of note only as an abusive, vindictive satire of no literary value. There are indications, however, that it was regarded more highly in its own time. When it was first published anonymously in January 1765, it had such a rapid sale that Beattie was persuaded to include it in the second edition of his poems in 1766. Many of his literary friends called it “one of the best and most spirited satires that was ever written”, with Hugh Blair considering it Beattie’s best poem to date.⁴ From the beginning, however, it was condemned as too severe by many readers, with little attention given to it after Beattie decided to exclude it from his collected poems in 1776 and later. But its memory was kept alive by nineteenth-century writers of memoirs, most of whom perpetuated the myth of its extreme severity and

¹ “Churchill’s Influence on Minor Eighteenth Century Satirists”, PMLA, XLII (1927), 163.
² The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill (Oxford, 1956), xxi. All quotations are from this edition.
worthlessness. With such a disparity between the eighteenth-century and modern views of the poem, one wonders where the truth lies. In fact, it can be shown not only that the poem offers an interesting perspective on the political, literary and religious ideas which marked the waning of the spirit of Augustan satire but also that it is a better poem than the modern commentators on Churchill will allow it to be. And in the context of Beattie’s own life and writings it provides an oblique but valuable commentary on the transition of the Neoclassic to the Romantic mode.

On the death of Dr Johnson in 1784, Beattie succeeded to the title of most-famous writer living in Britain and retained much of his popularity well into the Nineteenth century. As a poet he first got public notice and very high praise for *Original Poems and Translations* in 1761, with the second edition in 1766 receiving a similar reception.5 Thus his reputation called a large audience to the poem on Churchill, especially after it was published under his own name. Meanwhile he had been working on his long philosophical treatise against the sceptical writings of Hume, Berkeley, Malebranche and others. When the book was finally published in 1770 as *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*, in *Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism*, it became an instant “best-seller”, with almost twenty editions called for by the end of the century and translations into French, Dutch, German and Italian. Beattie was thus almost universally believed to be the great philosopher of his generation. But the main reason for this remarkable response was the fact that the *Essay* was regarded as Christian apology; the time was ripe for a spirited defense of religion and Beattie was thus seen as the writer who restated the basic beliefs of Christianity as the proper principles of philosophy.6 Meanwhile in 1771 Canto i of *The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius* was published, followed in 1774 by Canto ii, bringing to Beattie fame great enough to produce over fifty editions by the 1820s and lavish praise from almost all readers. As the first attempt in English to trace the effects of nature and experience on the poet’s own mind and imagination, the poem fascinated


the young Romantic poets and influenced them considerably, especially Wordsworth. By 1775 therefore Beattie seemed to be the harbinger of a new age of enlightenment and culture, with the reading public constantly requesting more books from him. To meet this demand he published a volume of literary essays in 1776 and another in 1783 which gained him a phenomenal reputation as a critic. Consequently Sir Walter Scott was merely echoing a long-held belief by praising Beattie in 1807 as "the most pleasing and ingenious writer on the Belles Lettres of his day."

Churchill's reputation at the time of his death in 1764 was the main reason that Beattie wrote a poem protesting the proposed monument. According to W. C. Brown, the great publicity Churchill received in the 1760s and later was "a tissue of fact, rumor, and prejudice, for which there were ample reasons but dubious justification" (v). Memoirs of the Reverend Mr Charles Churchill (1764), the only life Beattie could have read before writing his poem, is described by Douglas Grant as "a partisan and inaccurate sketch whose tone and matter were too frequently and uncritically adopted by later biographers" (v). Thus Beattie's claim in the vindication of his poem published as a preface in 1766 that he had "said nothing of Churchill's manner that is not warranted by the best authority" was probably based entirely on the opinion of his literary friends in Scotland, one of whom suggested that he write a poem of protest. There is no doubt that Churchill's reputation for sexual promiscuity and political amorality was widely accepted as true in Scotland. In fact, the many scathing attacks on Lord Bute, the Scottish prime minister of England, and on Scotland itself written by Churchill and John Wilkes in The North Briton made him the object of national hatred. And the anger of Scotsmen was greatly aggravated by his scornful delineation of Scotland as a barbarous land in his satire The Prophecy of Famine (1763). Thus it is clear that Beattie's poem added to Churchill's reputation as a lecher and political hack-

8 Edinburgh Review, 10 (April 1807), 199.
9 All quotations from Beattie's poem are from the first edition published in London in 1765; quotations from his preface are from the collected poems in The Aldine British Poets (London, 1831). References to his other poems are also from this edition.
writer; by striking a blow for Scotland's honour, in fact, Beattie became in a sense the prejudiced, opportunistic critic condemned by W. C. Brown in his complaint that "no reliable friend came forward to write about him after his death" (ii). The fact is that Churchill the man was known to Beattie only by his public reputation; it was the thought that such a scribbler might be sanctified with the great writers in Westminster Abbey which aroused Beattie's disgust and scorn. Seen in this light, Beattie's poem is much more than a scurrilous attack characterized solely by personal abuse. It is, in fact, a formal, public poem which demonstrates by direct statement, allusion and the satirist's personal conviction that Charles Churchill, the public person renowned as a sensational libertine and inflammatory writer, has no right to a public place of honour and posthumous prestige. The changes Beattie made in the second edition of the poem and the fact that the proposed monument had been forgotten by then show clearly that he regarded it as a satiric exposé of universal literary and political vices and follies. Thus he changed the title to "On the Report of a Monument to be erected in Westminster Abbey, to the Memory of a late Author" and substituted "Bufo" for Churchill's name and asterisks for Wilkes's name.

Of the seventy-three heroic couplets in the poem, forty-seven are directly concerned with Churchill's writings and reputation. This concerted barrage of controlled invective builds to a final burst of vehement frustration at the possibility of high honours being paid to him:

When to the grave descends the sensual sot,
Unnam'd, unnor'd, let his carrion rot...
But when a ruffian, whose portentous crimes
Like plagues and earthquakes terrify the times,
Triumphs through life, from legal judgment free,
For hell may hatch what law could ne'er foresee;
Sacred from vengeance shall his memory rest?—
Judas though dead, though damn'd, we still detest.

(135–46)

In contrast to Churchill's performance, the rest of the poem provides a vision of order and stability through the elegant and impassioned invocation of the great English writers who have established a standard of literary brilliance and moral worth:

Is this the land where Gray's unlabour'd art
Soothes, melts, alarms, and ravishes the heart;
While the lone wanderer's sweet complainings flow
In simple majesty of manly woe;
Or while, sublime, on eagle-pinion driven,
He soars Pindaric heights, and sails the waste of heaven?
Is this the land, o'er Shenstone's recent urn
Where all the Loves and gentler Graces mourn?
And where, to crown the hoary bard of night,
The Muses and the Virtues all unite?

The presentation of Beattie's studied schism between Churchill and the republic of English letters is sustained to the end where "Britannia" weeps "o'er her sullied fame" and "the Muse, with honest zeal possess'd" seeks to "avenge her country by [Churchill's] name disgrac'd" (128–30).

Beattie's poem grows out of a knowledge of Churchill's satires in general and of The Prophecy of Famine in particular. Starting with the defiant dismissal of Churchill and his writings ("Churchill, begone!") and the fervent wish that "Faction's fire" may "expire" with his death, the poem sets out to demonstrate the irreparable damage done to the common good by his obscene propaganda. The informing principle of Beattie's satiric technique entails the presentation of the world of English letters in terms of the very worst and the very best in literature. Churchill represents the extreme in bad writing, while Milton, Spenser, Shakespeare, Pope, Gray, Shenstone and Akenside are named as the greatest writers in the language. But even before he uses them to belittle Churchill, Beattie prepares at the beginning to support his denigration by alluding directly to Churchill's own writings. Dr Johnson called Churchill a blockhead; in Book ii of The Ghost (1762) therefore Churchill satirized Johnson as "Pomposo, —insolent and loud,/ [the] vain idol of a scribbling crowd" (653–54). In the third line of his poem Beattie turns this portrait against Churchill and to his own purpose by describing Churchill's "Fame" as the "dirty idol of the brainless crowd", thereby declaring himself on the side of Johnson as the great arbiter of morality and literary taste. And the polarity of the situation is clearly defined in line 6 by the equating of Churchill to "Cromwell, and Catiline [and] Guido Faux". This prepares the way for Beattie to refer specifically in the next verse-paragraph (7–18) to the description which Churchill gives of himself in The Prophecy of Famine (79–92). Churchill's portrait is ironic, claiming
for himself no inspiration from a “heavenly Muse” and “no judgment” to temper the “fires” of his “rash genius”. Rather his only “merit” is in having the “mere knock of rhyme, / Short gleams of sense, and satire out of time”. So that he has not got the “fancy” to write of nature nor the wit to “Coin fine new epithets, which mean no ill”. He is, in fact, too “uncouth” to be fit “For pacing poesy, and ambling wit”. Thus “Taste” beholds him with contempt, judging him to be unworthy of a place even “Amongst the lowest of her favour’d race”.

The point of Churchill’s mock disparagement of his poetic ability is to declare the impossibility of his writing pastorals so that he may call upon nature to help him to compose an ironic-heroic poem about Scotland. But Beattie deliberately misreads the passage as a statement of the truth, claiming that Churchill was “uninspir’d by nature, [and] untaught by art” and stressing the lies and lewdness of his verses, not even granting him “one pure unprostituted line”. Consequently “bawling blackguards” mistake Churchill’s “Coarse virulence in coarser doggerel writ” for “conscience, honour, slighted, spurn’d, o’erthrown.” Thus Beattie demonstrates how far beneath “the lowest of her favour’d race” true taste places Churchill: “Lo! Churchill shines the minion of renown!” Out of the implied superior satirist in Churchill’s self-portrait Beattie has created a servile follower of the unthinking mob. At this point, as the word “shines” makes one recall “Faction’s fire” of the opening line, one realizes that Beattie has completed his equation between the burning ardour of unlawful dissenters and the shining reputation of Churchill among them as a disturber of the peace. To advance the extreme contrast between Churchill and great writers, the very next line (19) introduces the celestial fire of the English imagination as hinted at in the allusion to Johnson earlier and in direct contrast to the hellish fire of Churchill’s influence: “Is this the land that boasts a Milton’s fire.” And the metaphor is extended into the “one strong blaze” by which Pope’s “energy divine . . . bade wit and fancy shine”, and into the “bold yet temperate flame of ancient days” in Akenside. In fact, the metaphor defines the limits of Beattie’s vision to the end of the poem with its implications for Churchill reiterated often since the poem’s overriding purpose is to make plain the evil of Churchillian political propaganda. Thus “Faction’s fire” is repeated, for example, in “rebellion’s brand” tossed by “Discord the fiend” (63), in
Churchill's "incendiary strain" (86) and in the "hell" that Beattie sends Churchill back to at the end. By contrast "Milton's fire" is reflected in the "lovely spark / Of wit" brightening the dark and showing "the gloom more hideous" (99–101), in "the pure diamond's flame" of truth (120) and in "Heaven's indulgent smile" (50). Beattie's system of derived symbols and allusions belies the poem's apparently simplistic movement towards the correction of the public view of Churchill. Having alluded to Churchill's treatment of Dr Johnson at the beginning, for example, Beattie subtly recalls Churchill's later attack on Johnson in Book iii of The Ghost where Pomposo's "Fame around should tell / How he a slave to interest fell" (797–98). Thus Beattie compares Churchill's fame to a contemptuous Irishman who "own'd his soul to liberty enslav'd" (96), thereby reversing the roles Churchill had assigned to himself and to Johnson in his poem. Such references are supported by Beattie's use of common satiric personifications that Churchill had also used: Discord who is disguised as Peace in The Prophecy of Famine (539–46) becomes in Beattie's poem "Discord the fiend" violently disrupting the peace of society; thus the liberty that Johnson stood for is ratified by Beattie, while Churchill's concept of liberty is equated to anarchy.

The dichotomy between great and bad writing is expressed through an implied vision of heaven and hell, with writers like Gray soaring to "Pindaric heights [in] the waste of heaven" and with Churchill in league "with Wilkes and Hell" (61). Thus Beattie begins by banishing Churchill from the civilized world implied in his poem and ends by pronouncing him worthy of the damnation inflicted on Judas as the most detestable of betrayers. The symbolism is supported by the use of the land of Milton, Shakespeare and the others as a kind of mythological kingdom in which good triumphs and evil-doers get their just deserts. By the implication of Beattie's Scottish birth and English writings, Scotland becomes a part of this "green and pleasant land" where the justice of earlier times is in danger of perversion by Churchillian hacks. In fact, Beattie draws the hint of Scotland's role in his poem from Churchill's The Prophecy of Famine where it is "the home . . . of all that is low, mean, base, and brutish." 10 In becoming the Champion of Scotland, Beattie combines it with England into the land of ultimate civilization.
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where great writing sets the standard of human behaviour. Thus it is the opposite of Churchill's Scotland. Churchill's Goddess of Famine foretells the conquest of England by the Scots: Beattie shows that the real enemy to civilization is within the community itself, identifies him with Churchill and his followers, and preaches the dire need to be vigilant against him. To erect a monument to Churchill in Westminster Abbey is to ratify bad writing and to degrade the great writers already commemorated there. Beattie's poem is thus concerned with a unified Britain in opposition to the warring states of England and Scotland of Churchill's poem.

Beattie's vision of the land overrun by the mob, burning and looting as it runs wild, owes a great deal to Pope. In addition to such Popean images as the sight of Churchill teaching prose to stagger and "limp on stilts of rhyme around the land" (82), the world of Beattie's poem is in part a parody of The Dunciad where the actions and speeches of the dunces indicate the effects of the spreading of stupidity and insanity throughout the land by the Goddess of Dulness, thereby putting out the light of intelligence and imagination. In fact, Beattie expects his readers to recall that Pope's Goddess is shown casting "a healing mist before the mind" throughout the whole of Britain (I, 151–55).\(^{11}\) The inevitable result is the symbolic destruction of true taste and the creation of ultimate mediocrity at the end of the poem when Dulness lets "the curtain fall, / And universal Darkness covers all" (III, 339–56). The most horrible aspect of this vision is the fact that it must occur if proper standards are not maintained: "Still her old empire to confirm, she tries, / For born a Goddess, Dulness never dies" (I, 16–17). The conclusion of the poem merely marks her return to her ancient realm of "Chaos and eternal Night" (I, 9–10). Thus Beattie shows Churchill as a disciple of Pope's Goddess, with his own Goddess of Famine being a new embodiment of dulness:

\[
\text{Hard-fated Churchill! could not dulness save} \\
\text{Thy soul from sin, from infamy thy grave!}
\]

(74–75)

This reprimand is introduced by the comparison of Churchill to Milton's Satan who "turn'd abhorrant from the hated light", thereby bringing the power of the Miltonic struggle between good and

\(^{11}\) All quotations are from The Poems of Alexander Pope (The one volume edition of the Twickenham Pope—London, 1965).
evil to support the allusions to Pope. Consequently the value one
puts on Beattie's poem depends on the extent to which one catches
such echoes of Milton, Pope and others in it. Beattie's lines about
rebellion triumphing "in the miseries of man", for instance, contain
at once a literal picture of mob-violence and echoes of the Biblical,
Miltonic apocalypse, and even of the "Conflagration" which marks
the absurd stage-effects of productions of Dr. Faustus in Pope's
time (III, 229–36). But the equation of Churchill to Popean dunces
is best served by verbal echoes, "Dulness and her sons admire / ... the
charms, that smite the simple heart / Not touch'd by Nature, and
not reach'd by Art" (III, 226–28): Churchill in Beattie's poem is
"By nature uninspir'd, untaught by art" (7). Thus the concept of
dulness in The Dunciad is brought to bear against Churchill, with
"the blind zeal of a misjudging crowd" (108) and similar lines
reiterating the Popean indictment of hack-writers.

Beattie's character in the figure of the satirist dominates his poem.
He literally speaks the poem, thereby setting himself up as public
prosecutor with his appeal being made to the literary taste and
sense of public morality of his readers. The satirist thus pays a gra-
cious compliment to them by assuming they have sufficient knowledge
and acumen to judge for themselves. In effect Beattie loudly pro-
claims his own reputation in opposition to Churchill's, so that in the
poem Churchill literally becomes the public figure he was rumoured
to be in life, while Beattie is presented as a writer of integrity and
good sense who after long silence is moved by exasperation at public
gullibility to speak out. In fact, Beattie's role is an interesting parody
of that played by Churchill in his poems and of the whole satiric
 treatment of Scotland in The North Briton. In No. 4, for instance,
Wilkes satirizes the Scottish people as if he were a Scotsman defend-
ing his country: Beattie the satirist is actually such a defender, with
the thrust of his rhetoric aimed at the false prophets, Churchill and
Wilkes. As the spokesman for enlightened society, Beattie is the
latest in the long line of angry prophets of truth stretching back
through Pope and Dryden to Biblical times and by implication to
Vergil and Homer. Beattie's aim was thus a high one: to preserve the
balance between reasoned restraint and flights of imaginative joy
associated with himself in the company of Milton, Shakespeare, Pope
and the rest, while showing without fear of contradiction that
Churchill's place was rightly with the Colley Cibbers and the hated
enthusiasts of earlier times. Aiming for the tone and authority of an Old-Testament prophet, Beattie's poem sounds more like the impassioned pulpit oratory of a George Whitefield. Whitefield's sermons were often condemned as marking a revival of enthusiasm: Beattie's poem has been dismissed as an artless diatribe. Both judgments are inaccurate.

In spite of the bitter, polemical temper of the poem, Beattie was not a vindictive person; rather he was viewed as a kind, gentle man by all who knew him, including Dr Johnson who wrote of him as "a philosopher, a poet, and a good man". In fact, he allowed anger to rise in him only over published ideas which he believed to be deleterious to society and especially to the young. It was this strong sense of duty to mankind, inspired by his teaching of young students at Aberdeen University, which prompted him to write the poem and forced him within a year to begin to compose the Essay on Truth, even though he detested metaphysics and suffered the physical and mental consequences of his long labour over it for the rest of his life. There is therefore no doubt of the truthfulness of his published vindication of the poem in which he claims to have written it "from a sincere desire to do some small service to my country, and to the cause of truth and virtue. The promoters of faction I ever did, and ever will consider as the enemies of mankind; to the memory of such I owe no veneration; to the writings of such I owe no indulgence."

The alluding to Churchill's poems as a part of his own satiric mechanism is a kind of compliment, indicating that Beattie knew of the grudging admiration for The Prophecy of Famine even in Scotland. He was undoubtedly aware that "The Scot's Magazine, while deploring its tendency to 'the widening national breaches, and fermenting (?)fomenting) divisions', praised it highly as a poem, and in a subsequent issue printed the work in its entirety with the remark that 'this epistle is by no means inferior with regard to its poetical merit, to the other productions of this ingenious writer'."

It was thus Beattie's respect for Churchill's abilities which caused him to follow the advice of his embarrassed friends to remove some of the more severe lines in the editions of his poems after 1766. Yet, as William Forbes claims, he was "exceedingly fond" of the poem;

in fact, the ambivalent attitude of both Beattie and his friends to the charge of "asperity" may be seen in Forbes's attempts to deal with it in writing Beattie's biography after his death. In "possessing no inconsiderable strength of thought, with a vigorous, though slovenly, energy of expression, which, notwithstanding all his profaneness, faction, calumny, and ribaldry", Churchill, Forbes writes, "still preserves, in a certain degree, his reputation as a poet." Having stressed "the intemperate zeal [with which] Churchill prostituted his poetical talents in the support of . . . the seditious demagogues, who . . . set all decency, good order, and good government at defiance", Forbes presents Beattie's "principles and opinions" as "the very reverse of theirs" and then comments on the poem: "The lines are therefore marked with more than ordinary asperity, though perhaps not more than the occasion warranted. The allusion, indeed, in the conclusion of the poem [comparing Churchill to Judas] was deservedly found fault with" (I, 88). At this point the reader is referred to the appendix where a note informs him of Forbes's decision not to write anything further about Churchill and not to include Beattie's poem: "... as the lines relate to political circumstances, long since out of date, they may ... be dispensed with" (III, 226). Forbes, it seems, sensed that Beattie was not really convinced of the literary inappropriateness of the allusion to Judas and of some other lines. Thus he echoes Beattie's main condemnation of Churchill for not writing even one "unprostituted line" by stressing the prostitution of his ability. The kind of convinced Christian to whom Judas immediately occurs as the symbol of betrayed principles and ideals is likely also to be a little ashamed of having pronounced such a judgment on a person, even if he believes the comparison to be just. As Beattie remarked in deciding whether to publish the Essay on Truth: "... there is a keenness of expression in some passages, which could please only a few, namely those who are thoroughly convinced of the truth and importance of religion" (Forbes, I, 129). The poem even in its original form, therefore, was clearly a public condemnation of the fashionable mob and the rewards it gives to writers who pander to it. Beattie's sincere belief in the justice of his cause imbues the poem with a strong sense of conviction and purpose and explains, if it does not justify, the severity of some passages.

Whether one can agree with W. C. Brown that Churchill was "a major figure in the tradition of Neo-classic satire" (i), there is
no doubt that he was one of the best satirists of the time. It is clear also, I think, that as his poetry "has been over-praised",\textsuperscript{14} so Beattie's satire has been undervalued. In fact, there are similarities between Churchill and Beattie which give an interesting perspective on the final resurgence of the heroic couplet as the effective vehicle of Augustan satire. In a sense Churchill's work provides the justification for the severity of Beattie's poem, for, as James Laver suggests, it is "difficult... not to be slightly horrified by Churchill's ridicule of Scottish poverty [in The Prophecy of Famine], or to gloat with him over the shepherd's five brothers who had perished in the Rebellion of '45" (xxxii). But the most significant similarity is the way in which both poets show the clear signs of the creation of a new mode of poetry, thereby signifying the end of Neoclassicism. Most of Churchill's verse is under the direct influence of the great Augustan satirists, with only Gotham (1764) having "couplets... less like those of Dryden and Pope and more like those of Keats, Tom Moore, and Shelley in the early nineteenth century." Thus it "anticipates the breakdown of the neo-classic couplet fifty years later."\textsuperscript{15} Beattie's work offers a much more important view of the transition of Neoclassicism to Romanticism. For he cultivated his satiric abilities only on the infrequent occasions when the need arose and concentrated instead on the traditional ode and elegy and especially on adapting the Spenserian stanza to the growing preoccupation with poetic identity.\textsuperscript{10} In fact, he created in The Minstrel the fundamental, simple pattern for this new nature-poetry which the Romantic poets transformed into great statements about the poetic life. The relationship between his satiric verse and his nature poems thus shows an interesting early attempt to cope with the tensions between Neoclassicism and Romanticism which helped to shape the poetry of all the young Romantic poets.

\textsuperscript{14} George Sampson, The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature (Cambridge, 1933), 356.
\textsuperscript{10} Brown, 145.
\textsuperscript{10} The only other important satire in the Beattie canon is "The Castle of Scepticism", a prose-allegory about Hume and other sceptical philosophers which was written as a respite from the composition of the Essay on Truth and which Beattie never intended to publish. See E. C. Mossner, "Beattie's 'The Castle of Scepticism': An Unpublished Allegory Against Hume, Voltaire, and Hobbes", Texas University Studies in English, No. 27 (1948), 108-45.
James Thomson's *The Seasons* and *The Castle of Indolence* exerted the greatest influence on Beattie's version of the young poet beset by the cares of the world and of the poetic life. Thus *The Minstrel* provided a necessary transitional link between the nature-poetry of the early eighteenth century and the Wordsworthian vision of the poet conquering the problems of poetic identity and its place in the universe. Beattie's poem on Churchill indicates other aspects of the essential difference between the Thomsonian and the Wordsworthian view of man and nature. In its relation to *The Minstrel* the poem also shows that Beattie's progress towards his own minor Romantic vision was affected by the characteristic tensions between Neoclassic and Romantic attitudes. For the poem is an imitation of Popean satire, with no hint in it that within a year of its publication Beattie would start to write in a fundamentally different style in *The Minstrel*. The relationship between the satirist's view of life and the Romanticist's need to show man and nature realistically is a main feature of the evolution of Romanticism. Beattie's place in this process may be seen by considering the versions of nature and satire in Pope and Wordsworth. By 1712 Pope had begun to move from the Thomsonian world of *Windsor Forest* into the devastating satiric vision of *The Dunciad*; by 1805 Wordsworth's compulsion to describe himself and his environment solely in terms of his own imaginative development would allow satire very little room in *The Prelude*. Thus over the course of the century one may see in the work of the greatest Augustan satirist and of the greatest Romantic poet of nature an almost exact reversal of emphasis in the prominence given to the literary concepts of satire and nature. Even though the charting of this transition has been a major preoccupation of modern criticism, it is remarkable that Beattie has been assigned little significance in its evolution. There is, in fact, no clearer, more comprehensive index to the changing attitudes and poetic techniques of the time than his poetry. Not only are his poems solidly Augustan in derivation and intent but also they cultivated enough new ideas and techniques to exert an important seminal influence on the young Romantic poets. Coming near the mid-point of the century, the poems thus show the poetic tide turning away from the Popean to the Wordsworthian view.

Apart from such distinctive Romantic qualities as its autobiographical cast, new rhythms and hints of a visionary landscape,
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The Minstrel became popular because it unified and crystallized many hitherto diverse poetic elements, including Popean outbursts against the sophists, sceptics and infidels Beattie was currently refuting in the Essay on Truth. The dreamworld of innocence and love of Edwin, the young minstrel, was not a perfect refuge from such creatures, for the very thought of them, even in the midst of Wordsworthian boyhood recollections, immediately called forth the vituperative "warmth" of the Essay:

Hence! ye, who snare and stupify the mind,
Sophists, of beauty, virtue, joy, the bane!
Greedy and fell, though impotent and blind,
Who spread your filthy nets in Truth's fair fane,
And ever ply your venom'd fangs amain!
Hence to dark Error's den, whose rankling slime
First gave you form! Hence! lest the Muse should deign
(Though loath on theme so mean to waste a rhyme),
With vengeance to pursue your sacrilegious crime.

(I, xli)

In fact, the poem contains many religious and philosophical echoes of the Essay which underscore the great hope that the minstrel's innocence might not be corrupted. Beattie himself had come through the battle largely unscathed and rejoicing:

Blest be the day I 'scap'd the wrangling crew,
From Pyrrho's maze, and Epicurus' sty;
And held high converse with the godlike few,
Who to th' enraptur'd heart, and ear, and eye,
Teach beauty, virtue, truth, and love, and melody.

(I, xl)

Clearly Beattie called upon his poetic Muse in the cause against scepticism. Such references scattered throughout the poem recalled the Essay for eighteenth-century readers, who undoubtedly interpreted it in part as another type of antidote against evil. Much of the wisdom of the hermit, the old recluse who teaches Edwin the ways of God and man, is his knowledge of the world's folly and vanity, forcing him to wish that Edwin might return to "the gay dreams of fond Romantic youth" (II, xxx). This desire for the recreation of innocence was surely a major force in the writing of The Minstrel itself. The poem therefore had an appeal for an age in which metaphysical works were widely read that it has since lost. These ideas in The Minstrel were drawn from the Essay on Truth and the poem
on Churchill, while their style and satiric thrust were learned in writing about Churchill as if he were a Human sceptic.

It is thus significant that the poem on Churchill had an effect similar to that of The Minstrel on at least one Romantic poet. Echoes of The Minstrel are found in abundance in the major and minor poets of the nineteenth century; the many borrowings from it in Coleridge's poems indicate that he would see many similarities between Edwin and Thomas Chatterton when he was writing his Monody on the Death of Chatterton in 1790. Consequently it is striking that he should model the following lines on Beattie's "Is this the land" passages from the poem on Churchill:

Is this the land of liberal Hearts!
Is this the land, where Genius ne'er in vain
Pour'd forth her soul-enchanting strain?
Ah me! yet Butler 'gainst the bigot foe
Well-skill'd to aim keen Humour's dart...

(13-16)

It is even more significant that Beattie's lines should retain a place in Coleridge's revision of the poem published in 1794:

Is this the land of song-ennobled line?
Is this the land where Genius ne'er in vain
Pour'd forth her lofty strain?
Ah me! Yet Spenser, gentlest bard divine,
Beneath chill Disappointment's shade...

(33-37)

One notes the closeness of Coleridge's themes to Beattie's, especially those concerned with the genius of English writers, "liberal Hearts" bigoted foes, and the effects of disappointment. Coleridge's borrowings indicate not only that there is an important connection between The Minstrel and the poem on Churchill in terms of the evolution of Romanticism but also that the poem's value is marked by the ability to fertilize the genius of another poet.

Modern critics are clearly mistaken in slighting Beattie's poem as having no value in itself. It is not only a good, spirited imitation of its Popean model but also it is, I think, closer to the mode of Dryden and Pope than Churchill's work, at least in its use of allusions to support its claims. As Churchill's poems are not condemned for their severity, so the charge that Beattie's poem contains too much "asperity" is not valid, for both poets are merely following
the Neoclassic tradition of vigorous satire. Beattie was, in fact, replying in kind to Churchill's literary abuse of Scotland. Thus Churchill's death is not at issue, except as the event which led to the suggestion of erecting a monument to his honour. For in Beattie's poem the type that Churchill stands for is under attack much more than the person himself. One might recall that well over half of the people attacked in *The Dunciad* were dead long before Pope wrote the poem. It is thus a misinterpretation to read Beattie's poem as a personal diatribe against an individual who cannot reply. Rather its main preoccupation lies in the Popean theme of castigating the mob and its blind following of political and literary hack-writers. With all the sincerity, honesty, integrity and concern of the traditional satirist permeating its vision, the poem shows Beattie in the role of "a good hater".¹⁷ And in its relationship to Beattie's other poems, it gives valuable evidence of the state of Augustan satire as it fought vainly to sustain itself in the face of the Romantic assumptions which had been undermining it for some time.

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