THE CRITICAL HERITAGE

GEORGE CRABBE

Edited by
ARTHUR POLLARD

GEORGE CRABBE: THE CRITICAL HERITAGE

THE CRITICAL HERITAGE SERIES

General Editor: B. C. Southam

The Critical Heritage series collects together a large body of criticism on major figures in literature. Each volume presents the contemporary responses to a particular writer, enabling the student to follow the formation of critical attitudes to the writer's work and its place within a literary tradition.

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To the memory of

URSULA

beloved companion
and helpmeet
from the first days of our marriage
to the last of her life

The Parish Register III, 581–6

General Editor's Preface

The reception given to a writer by his contemporaries and near contemporaries is evidence of considerable value to the student of literature. On one side we learn a great deal about the state of criticism at large and in particular about the development of critical attitudes towards a single writer; at the same time, through private comments in letters, journals or marginalia, we gain an insight upon the tastes and literary thought of individual readers of the period. Evidence of this kind helps us to understand the writer's historical situation, the nature of his immediate reading-public, and his response to these pressures.

The separate volumes in the *Critical Heritage Series* present a record of this early criticism. Clearly, for many of the highly productive and lengthily reviewed nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, there exists an enormous body of material; and in these cases the volume editors have made a selection of the most important views, significant for their intrinsic critical worth or for their representative quality—perhaps even registering incomprehension!

For earlier writers, notably pre-eighteenth century, the materials are much scarcer and the historical period has been extended, sometimes far beyond the writer's lifetime, in order to show the inception and growth of critical views which were initially slow to appear.

In each volume the documents are headed by an Introduction, discussing the material assembled and relating the early stages of the author's reception to what we have come to identify as the critical tradition. The volumes will make available much material which would otherwise be difficult of access and it is hoped that the modern reader will be thereby helped towards an informed understanding of the ways in which literature has been read and judged.

B.C.S.

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Acknowledgments

I should like to thank the Librarian and staff of the Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull, for so kindly obtaining many of the periodicals which have been used in this collection. My thanks are also due to a number of colleagues, notably Dr J. A. Michie of the Department of English and Mr J. R. Jenkinson of the Department of Classics, and to Mr Roger Lonsdale of Balliol College, Oxford, and Dr Anthony Shipps of the University of Indiana, who helped to locate several quotations. Despite this help, the identity of a few quotations has continued to elude me. I owe a considerable debt to my secretary, Miss Ruth Green. The biggest obligation, as it always has been, is acknowledged in the dedication, now, alas too late for her to receive this recognition of it.

Introduction

'He is (or ought to be—for who reads him?) a living classic.'[1] In that one sentence Dr Leavis has stated the paradox of Crabbe's place in English literature. His status as a classic was indirectly urged by T. S. Eliot in an essay on Johnson's poetry[2] when he argued that

> Those who demand of poetry a day dream, or a metamorphosis of their own feeble desires and lusts, or what they believe to be 'intensity' of passion, will not find much in Johnson. He is like Pope and Dryden, Crabbe and Landor, a poet for those who want poetry and not something else, some stay for their own vanity.

Discounting the Eliotian provocativeness (or arrogance, perhaps) one can see in this sentence, at the conclusion of his essay, the sort of poetry he is arguing for, albeit not so well as that he is arguing against. In saying that, we are immediately confronted with one of the familiarities, but also one of the difficulties, of Crabbe criticism. Eliot, not least, has reminded us that the most enlightening criticism is often that which is comparative, and right from Crabbe's own time (the inadequate 'Pope in worsted stockings' being only the most memorable) attempts have been made to define him by comparison. Often, however, they leave us at the end little better informed about what is 'poetry and not something else' in Crabbe than we were at the beginning.

Even this single sentence of Eliot's misses the mark for Crabbe, for in his later work there is much ' "intensity" of passion' within the action—whilst at the same time the narrative is told from a dry, detached point of view. It is not only Crabbe's place in English literature that is paradoxical. In literary history he stands between two distinct eras, the Augustan and the Romantic, belonging in part to both, yet owing total allegiance to neither. He writes in a form of the heroic couplet that can be variously considered as either freer or less controlled than that of the Augustans, and yet it fulfils Eliot's maxim that 'to have the virtues of good prose is the first and minimum requirement of good poetry.' I know that Crabbe's contemporary reviewers complained of the vagaries and inaccuracies of his grammar and vocabulary (see, for example, No. 28), and that he indisputably became increasingly prolix with the

passage of the years, but we do well to remind ourselves, again in Eliot's words, that 'we ought to distinguish between poetry which is like *good* prose, and poetry which is like *bad* prose.' In this distinction Crabbe's belongs clearly to the first category. Of course, this is the place at which we are reminded of Hazlitt's question, 'Why not in prose?' The best answer I know is W. C. Roscoe's (No. 67), but there is another—have you ever read Crabbe's prose? Look at his letters, especially the later ones, look at the correct but lifeless expression of his dedications and prefaces—then look at his verse, and you will see how much he has exceeded 'the minimum requirement of good poetry'. But the fact that Hazlitt could ask his question is yet another of the paradoxes in Crabbe.

One more paradox lies in Crabbe's relationship with his birth-place. He could never escape from it, and yet he did not like it. E. M. Forster has remarked on this phenomenon[3], concluding that 'This attraction for the Aldeburgh district, combined with that strong repulsion from it, is characteristic of Crabbe's uncomfortable mind.' Within that uncomfortable mind he could be, as F. L. Lucas has so concisely summed it up, 'naïve, yet shrewd; straightforward, yet sardonic; blunt, yet tender; quiet, yet passionate; realistic, yet romantic'.[4] Yet this complicated, if not complex, poet was (and is) often dismissed as too narrow in his interests and in his response. At the same time as the critic is making such judgments, he is all too often aware that Crabbe, nonetheless, defies classification.

The quotation from Eliot which I have given in my first paragraph continues: 'I sometimes think that our own time, with its elaborate equipment of science and psychological analysis, is even less fitted than the Victorian age to appreciate poetry as poetry.' In this collection an attempt is made to see how Crabbe's own age responded to him volume by volume and then what the Victorians saw in him. The first point to make here is that Crabbe's first poem was published in 1780, his last in 1834. So often Crabbe seems to be thought of as the poet of *The Village* (indeed, there seems to be more than a hint of this in Eliot's remarks), but that poem was published in 1783 and belongs to the world of Johnson and Goldsmith and Cowper. Because they are also poems about people in small, close, tightly knit communities, there is often also a tendency to think of *The Parish Register* (1807) and *The Borough* (1810) as simply more extensive successors of *The Village*. They are, and they are not. Besides a somewhat mellower tone that no doubt came from maturity, experience and his own easier circumstances, these poems

represent new departures, and in particular *The Borough* is, as Crabbe's son and biographer remarked, 'a great spring upwards'. In three ways at least—psychological analysis; evident, even at times obtrusive, moral concern; and the handling of verse and language in a manner far more characteristically his own than in the earlier poems—Crabbe struck out in new directions. What did the critics make of the poet newly emergent from over twenty years of silence? This is one of the questions to which these reviews should supply an answer. And what did they make of the incredibly prolific next few years? In other words, instead of seeing Crabbe as we too often tend to do (and were the Victorians here included doing just the same?) as one and the same throughout his career, we have the chance of seeing him through the eyes of his critics as they saw him at the several stages of that career. We also have the opportunity of seeing them at work, of tracing the movement of critical taste and the way in which this affected response to Crabbe himself. And how important this is for a writer who was praised by Johnson, the last Augustan, and who yet survived all the younger generation of the major Romantic poets! Yet another way in which this collection may help is in the search for an answer as to why he was so popular at a time when these latter poets were not. Why did the whirligig of taste swing so much in his favour and against them?

As we look beyond Crabbe's own time, we have the opportunity and the means of exploring the reaction against him. It is there, notably in Hazlitt, in Crabbe's own last years. Was Crabbe not 'Romantic' enough? Gilfillan (No. 65) was neither the first nor the last to be so much moved by 'The Hall of Justice' and 'Sir Eustace Grey', only perhaps the most fully explicit. Why did Crabbe's 'realism' and his discovery of what in effect was the short story in verse fail to appeal to the fiction-dominated Victorian age? Or is it, as the sentence from Eliot above might suggest, that somehow psychological analysis and poetry are uneasy bedfellows? But then why did Browning succeed and Crabbe descend to the doldrums or to the coteries of admiring enthusiasts? And why have we in this century failed to get much nearer to him? Was Leavis right in believing that Crabbe 'was hardly at the fine point of consciousness in his time',[5] and does this mean that each succeeding generation must struggle to find his characteristic and essential worth? FitzGerald was only one of many among those who would make 'cullings from' or 'readings in' Crabbe. The implications of such selection are clearly that, though much has vanished, much deserves to remain.

I

PUBLICATION AND PRINT RUNS

Crabbe's first work, *Inebriety* (1775), was printed and sold by C. Punchard in Ipswich. His next, *The Candidate*, was printed by John Nichols (*Literary Anecdotes*, VIII. 77), published by H. Payne and ran to 250 copies. Nichols also printed *The Library* in 200 copies for subscribers (ibid., VIII. 90). This latter poem ran to a second edition in 1783 and, like its successors, *The Village* and *The Newspaper*, was published by Dodsley. The print runs for these poems and for the second edition of *The Library* are not known, nor are those of the later works, namely, *Poems* (1807), *The Borough* (1810) and *Tales* (1812), all printed by John Brettell and published by Hatchard. There were nine editions of *Poems* and six of *The Borough* by 1817 and seven of *Tales* by 1815. Murray, who took over the remainder stock on becoming Crabbe's publisher, reissued the first two in their remaining 2,000 royal 8vo copies in 1820, together with an unknown number of foolscap 8vo copies of *Tales*, to the last of which he added a new edition of 750 copies as part of a seven-volume edition of the *Works*. The only new work of Crabbe's that Murray published was *Tales of the Hall* (1819), printed by Thomas Davison and issued first in 3,000 copies of a two-volume edition, followed in the same year by another of 1,500 copies and in 1820 by one in three volumes running to 3,000 copies. In 1823 Murray published a five-volume edition in foolscap 8vo (number of copies not known). Finally the *Poetical Works* of 1834 appeared in 7,000 copies of Volume I (which contained the *Life* by Crabbe's son) and 5,000 copies each of the other seven volumes. On 8 May 1846 Murray informed the younger Crabbe that this edition had 'come to a dead stand and there is no demand for it'. As a result, he published the *Works* in one volume in 1847, and this was followed by further editions in this form in 1854, 1867 and 1901.[6]

II

THE EARLY POEMS

The first of Crabbe's poems to be noticed by the reviewers was *The Candidate: a Poetical Epistle to the Authors of the Monthly Review* (1780). With that excessive modesty which marked the tone of his approach to the public throughout his life Crabbe sought the candid judgment of the

Monthly Reviewers upon his work. These last—or, rather, Edmund Cartwright, subsequently to become Crabbe's friend—duly responded. Behind a pretence of impartiality this review (No. 1) was suitably flattered at being thus singled out. The *Critical Review* was correspondingly annoyed by Crabbe's choice and proceeded to discover in the poem 'incurable METROMANIA', 'mad questions', 'ungrammatical transpositions' and 'unintelligible expressions' (No. 2), whilst with greater brevity the *Gentleman's Magazine* (No. 3) advised the Monthly Reviewers not to give the poet much encouragement.

Like its predecessor, Crabbe's next poem, *The Library* (1781), also appeared anonymously. It met a better fate. Cartwright in the *Monthly* considered it 'the production of no common pen' (No. 6), but the *Critical* was most outstanding in its praise (No. 4). With a precision missing from the *Monthly* and the *Gentleman's Magazine* it noted that the poem's 'rhymes are correct and the versification smooth and harmonious' and that there are lines which are 'manly, nervous, and poetical'. This is the critical vocabulary of the Augustan age, and whilst it fitted Crabbe's early works, it was less apt for the assessment of the later.

In his next poem, and the first incidentally to appear over his own name, *The Village* (1783), Crabbe's dissatisfaction with some of the poetical conventions of his day is evident. Dr. Johnson found the work 'original, vigorous, and elegant' (No. 7). In his reaction to the nostalgic pastoralism of Goldsmith and his like:

> I paint the Cot,
> As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.
> [I, 33–34]

Crabbe is both original and vigorous. Whether he is elegant is another matter. The *Critical Review* agreed with Crabbe's strictures, but it had also to point out that the subject was forsaken abruptly for the poem to conclude with a long encomium on members of the Rutland family (No. 8). The *Gentleman's Magazine*, though complimentary, noted Crabbe's insistence on 'the dark side of the landscape' (No. 10). Here was the first statement of a recurring criticism both in his own lifetime and ever since. Cartwright in the *Monthly Review* (No. 9) was even more explicit, complaining that the poet was asserting 'as a general proposition what can only be affirmed of individuals'. To this he added the charge of illogicality—'the second part contradicts the assertion of the first'. None the less, despite these criticisms, *The Village* received more serious attention than its predecessor.

In some respects, therefore, *The Newspaper* (1785) must have seemed an anticlimax. The *Gentleman's Magazine*, always the most perfunctory of the three reviews, did not notice it, and the other two (Nos 11 and 12) resorted to outline and quotation to conclude with fainter praise than they gave to *The Village* and unconcealed disappointment following the achievement of that poem. After this, being now established in the Church through the efforts mainly of Burke who had been impressed by *The Library*, Crabbe settled into twenty-two years of literary silence.

III

POEMS (1807)

He only re-emerged when the need for money to finance his son's university education compelled him to do so. The result was *Poems* (1807), a volume containing his early work, some of it revised, and a few new pieces, of which *The Parish Register* was the most important. In general, the new collection received a very favourable welcome. In this new generation the three periodicals which had reviewed Crabbe's earlier work were still in circulation, but their mode of reviewing—by maximum quotation and minimum comment—was now being superseded by the more extensive and detailed criticism characteristic of the new century. The *Critical Review* did not notice the 1807 poems, whilst the *Gentleman's Magazine* (No. 13), typically, dealt only in the most general comment. In the *Monthly Review* (No. 17) Denman, the future Lord Chief Justice, after a meandering start on the literary advice given to Crabbe by Johnson and Fox, and the usual long quotation and vague remarks, struck a more individual note in his last paragraph with its commendation of Crabbe's 'manly and powerful' language in contrast with the 'disgusting cant of idiot-simplicity'. This, however, only serves to remind us, first, that Jeffrey could do this kind of thing much better, and, secondly, to illustrate B. C. Nangle's point that under the younger Griffiths, who had succeeded his father as editor of the *Monthly Review*, 'an extremely able staff of men were placed in a strait jacket of restrictive prohibitions which hampered their free expression and which made their comments seem stodgy, dull and old-fashioned when set beside the new style of slashing, colourful and vivid writing in the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly*'.[7]

The 1807 volume came, in fact, before the *Quarterly* began to appear (its first issue was February 1809), whilst the *Edinburgh*, though provid-

ing with the *Eclectic* the most extensive and, in the modern sense, critical estimation, was to produce both more penetrating and more balanced judgments in its consideration of later volumes. All Crabbe's subsequent works published in his lifetime would be reviewed by Jeffrey, and only the last of the *Edinburgh*'s reviews of Crabbe (on the *Life and Poetical Works* (1834)) would come from another pen, namely, that of Empson. In his *Contributions* (1844) Jeffrey gave more space to Crabbe than to any other poet on the grounds that Crabbe had had less justice done to him by comparison with the others. The review of the 1807 *Poems* (No. 16), whilst welcoming Crabbe back to the literary scene (as did a number of other periodicals), was not, by any means, the best of Jeffrey's considerations. It acknowledged Crabbe's force and truth in description and noted in 'The Hall of Justice' his ability to trace 'the tragic passions of pity and horror'. He also praised, with more than one use of the word, what he calls Crabbe's 'sarcasm'. Of his incidental criticisms we may remark his awareness that Crabbe's 'Chinese accuracy' may yet seem sometimes 'tedious and unnecessary'. This review is remarkable, however, for reasons other than the attention it gives to Crabbe. The criticism itself tends to decline into lengthy quotation and brief comment, but the real power and passion of the article—and this is a major reason why it is not among Jeffrey's finest assessments of Crabbe—lies in its extensive diversion on the shortcomings of the Lake Poets. Crabbe becomes a stick with which to beat Wordsworth. This collection is not the place to include such comments, but I have none the less excerpted a brief paragraph on Martha Ray to give something of the flavour of this criticism alongside and in contrast with what Jeffrey has to say about Crabbe.

The critics rightly saw *The Parish Register* as the major new contribution of the 1807 volume. Most of them welcomed it as a more extensive treatment of the area and topics Crabbe had considered in *The Village*. Though many noted the likenesses, there was little attempt at comparative judgment. The *Annual Review* (No. 19), however, made a succinct and just assessment in seeing the new work as 'on the whole less gloomy, less poetical, has no general plan, fewer general reflections, and more depth of thought'. Of the various character-sketches those of Phoebe Dawson and Richard Monday were most widely praised, whilst that of Isaac Ashford, the 'good peasant', also received some favour. The *Eclectic Review* (No. 21) praised it, but, alongside general criticisms conspicuous for their perspicacity (the reviewer was the underrated hymn-writer and critic, James Montgomery), there is a sermonising note upbraiding Crabbe's occasional lapses in moral seriousness—especially on death. By

contrast, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* (No. 14) commended the proper balance of his sentiments on this subject as compared with 'the enthusiastic cant of those ignorant preachers whom the Methodists send forth in swarms'. This hint of sectarian animosity was at this time a cloud the size of a man's hand in the sky of Crabbe-criticism. It would not long remain so small.

IV

THE BOROUGH (1810)

Crabbe's fifties were a phenomenally productive period in his poetical life. Once he had returned with the 1807 *Poems*, he followed this volume first with *The Borough* (1810) and then with *Tales* (1812). 'This late spring of public favour' was to ripen, as Jeffrey hoped, into 'mature fame'. The poetry of community in *The Village* and then in the country parson's reflections on the 'simple annals of the VILLAGE POOR' in *The Parish Register* was developed and extended in Crabbe's recollections of his native Aldeburgh which form the staple of *The Borough*. Indeed, the *Monthly Review* (No. 22) was to characterize the new poem as Crabbe's '*Village*, extended beyond all reasonable limits', and the generous Jeffrey had to agree that a severe critic might find that 'its peculiarities are more obtrusive, its faults greater, and its beauties less' (No. 23). Grant in the *Quarterly* (No. 27) (though nineteenth-century writers thought it was Gifford[8]) discriminated more finely when he said: 'While the defects are more aggravated as well as more thickly sown, the beauties, though not less scantily doled out, are unquestionably touched with a more affecting grace and softness.' Crabbe's most ambitious poem to date was seen therefore as largely the mixture as before, except that there was more of it. In this excess some critics showed signs of surfeit. What was new was not striking enough, what was striking was not new enough.

The Borough was noticed by the old trio of the *Monthly*, the *Critical* (Nos 22 and 25) and the *Gentleman's* and by newer reviews which fall quite neatly into pairs—two religious periodicals, the *Eclectic Review* and the *Christian Observer* (Nos 24 and 29); two lesser publications of more recent origin, the *Monthly Mirror* and the *British Critic* (Nos 26 and 28), and finally what were to become the twin giants, the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* (Nos 23 and 27). Of these, the last, together with the two religious reviews and the *Monthly Mirror* were largely hostile. By contrast, the *British Critic* was extremely laudatory. Jeffrey's essay in the

Edinburgh manifested that discriminating but sympathetic criticism which reveals the extent of his rapport with the poet and which made him the most reliable of Crabbe's contemporary critics.

The procedure of considering seriatim the several letters which constitute the poem was almost universally adopted, but the *Gentleman's Magazine* outdid the other journals in its characteristic mode of lengthy summary with little accompanying criticism. It discovered some 'truly *Hogarthean* traits—*ut Pictura Poesis*' in 'Elections' (Letter V), a comparison taken up at large by the *Monthly Review* (No. 22) which described Crabbe as 'the Hogarth of poetry', and for purposes of condemnation—with a quotation from Reynolds—by the *Christian Observer*. The *Monthly* preferred, however, to concentrate its censure upon the poet's 'want of arrangement' and his 'unfavourable opinion of mankind and his austere morality'. (Incidentally, it incorrectly ascribed the sin of Jachin (Letter XIX), pocketing the sacramental contribution, to Abel Keene (Letter XXI).) It also noted his increasing inclination to prolixity. To these the *Critical* (No. 25) added 'his occasionally prosaic familiarity almost to vulgarity [and] his carelessness of style'. The now familiar indictment was being built up, but the *Critical* also listed his qualities—'the faithfulness and spirit of his satire, his accurate delineation of almost every species of character, his easy and simple flow of poetical diction, his continual intermixture of pathetic and ludicrous observation, and the air of good nature, which tempers the rigour of his severest passages.'

To what would become the recurrent criticisms that are mentioned above two others were added. One of these was contained in the *Monthly Mirror* (No. 26) which began by lambasting what it called 'this frightful preface' with its 'attempts to anticipate every possible objection to every objectionable part of the poem, and to apologize for, and make exceptions to, the severity of its satire'. The *Eclectic* (No. 24) also rebuked Crabbe's 'solicitude' to mollify his satire as well as his servility to his patron. In addition, this review advanced the second objection—to Crabbe's attack on Dissenters in the fourth Letter of the poem.[9] In a lengthy five-page digression the reviewer condemned Crabbe as unfair to Dissenters as a body, as doubtfully accurate even in his portrayal of individuals and as questionably employing burlesque and buffoonery for the serious purpose of correcting religious eccentricity. The *Christian Observer* (No. 29) supported its contemporary in more ponderous tone and even extended its rebuke to 'the spirit of levity' with which Crabbe delineated the vicar (Letter III). By contrast, the Tory and High Church *British Critic* (No. 28) fervently and at length quoted the prose introduc-

tion to Letter IV with its 'very sensible and judicious remarks on the enthusiasts'.

The opposition of the *Edinburgh* and the new *Quarterly* under Gifford was both more subtle and more literary. Robert Grant, in the latter (No. 27), found Crabbe hostile to high imagination through his realism and went on to complain that, by distinction from the Dutch school of painters with whom he was often compared, Crabbe's realism was not even successful in itself because it lacked that 'happiness of execution' which the painters possessed. Crabbe's microscopic eye, whilst it made for 'minute accuracy', produced 'an air of littleness and technical precision'. Grant thought that Crabbe's great virtue was force, but it was accompanied by such defect of taste that the result was often coarseness. Whether one agrees with this or not, it has to be recognized as the most penetrating analysis of the poet's realism up to that date. It really attempts to examine what it was that laid so much of Crabbe's work open to the charge of being disgusting. It also seeks to explain why 'in his pity there seems to be more of contempt than of tenderness, and the objects of his compassion are at the same time the objects of his satire.' Grant, it will be seen, was basically anti-realist. Indeed, his review began with the claim that 'poetry . . . must flatter the imagination', 'drawing us away from the fatigues of reality'. Others made the same complaint, the *Christian Observer*, for example, noting the difference between Crabbe's subjects and those of Campbell and Scott.

Jeffrey (No. 23) presents us with the other side of the coin. He frankly accepted some of Crabbe's scenes and characters as disgusting, but he also examined at some length the nature of the disgusting in order to achieve a more precise definition and a more accurate separation of some of the poet's portraits than other reviews had achieved. He anticipated Grant by enlisting the roles of compassion and satire in determining what is disgusting: 'The only sufferers, then, upon whom we cannot bear to look, are those that excite pain by their wretchedness, while they are too depraved to be the objects of affection, and too weak and insignificant to be the causes of misery to others, or, consequently of indignation to the spectators.' This is a laudable attempt to deal with a difficult problem. It leads Jeffrey, however, to a condemnation of several characters in *The Borough*, among them Abel Keene, Blaney, Benbow—'and a good part of those of Grimes and Ellen Orford'! Something had gone wrong when these last two had to be included. With Grimes Jeffrey perhaps had failed to recognize the tragic depths of human suffering to be found even in the depraved. With all of them, however, he seems not

to have allowed enough for the moral tenor of Crabbe's work. This is the more surprising when one realizes how most sensitively of all the critics he had recognized the poet's especial awareness of the universality of human experience to be found in common everyday life—'the truest and most pathetic pictures of natural feeling and common suffering. By the mere force of his art, and the novelty of his style, he forces us to attend to objects that are usually neglected, and to enter into feelings from which we are in general but too eager to escape.' To put it no higher than this, Jeffrey realized that, because we do not like a thing, it does not thereby become necessarily disgusting. He concluded the sentence quoted with the words—'and then trusts to nature for the effect of the representation'. In other words, he saw too, as so few of his fellow-critics did, that though Crabbe might sometimes oppress with redundant descriptive minutiae, his most powerful overall effects came not from what he said but from what he left unsaid, from poetry which works 'not so much in what it directly supplies to the imagination, as in what it enables it to supply to itself', from poetry of suggestion, that is, rather than from poetry of statement. Here is a fine perception of Crabbe the quintessential Romantic, not just the Gothicized Romantic of 'Sir Eustace Grey'. Why, oh why, then had Jeffrey been so harsh on Wordsworth? The next paragraph of this very review opens with a sentence that might have come from the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*: 'Now, the delineation of all that concerns the lower and most numerous classes of society is, in this respect, on a footing with the pictures of our primary affections,—that their originals are necessarily familiar to all men, and are inseparably associated with a multitude of their most interesting impressions.' Fundamental and universal, this, the romanticism of 'cottages, streets and villages', Jeffrey preferred to that of 'palaces, castles or camps'.

Jeffrey recognized also the task, 'in a great degree new and original in our language', which Crabbe had assumed as 'the satirist of low life'. One letter, in particular,—that on amusements—was widely commended for its light-hearted criticism. Generally speaking, Crabbe was praised for three qualities—his satire, together with his realism (when it was not disgusting) and his capacity for pathos. The tale of Thomas and Sally in Letter II received special mention in this last respect from the *Christian Observer* and the *British Critic*, whilst the *Quarterly* juxtaposed the very powerful but very similar descriptions of the ostracized parish-clerk (Letter XIX), Abel Keene (XXI) and Peter Grimes (XXII). The combination of low life and suffering, and especially merited suffer-

ing, presented the critics with a new problem of judgment (only Langhorne had ever, previously, approached this area of life in literature). Their puzzlement is reflected in their judgments. The *Critical* (No. 25) praised the portrait of Jachin, for example, for its fine control of varying tone and the hostile *Monthly Mirror* (No. 26) thought this sketch commendable, whereas the *Eclectic* (No. 24), no doubt affected by religious bias, rejected it as morally objectionable. Nor was Jeffrey alone in his discomfort about Peter Grimes; the favourable *British Critic* (No. 28) was also repelled, whereas the *Gentleman's* thought this story 'depicted with a masterly hand' and the *Eclectic* (No. 24), in this case doubtless helped by its Evangelical view of human depravity, thought it 'the master-piece of the volume'.

Grant (No. 27), singling out 'Sir Eustace Grey' from the 1807 volume, praised Crabbe's psychological power; his 'delineations of the passions are so just—so touching of the gentle, and of the awful so tremendous'. Jeffrey (No. 23) at the end of his review also picked out this poem. At the same time he suggested that the poet's 'unrivalled gift in the delineation of character which is now used only for the creation of detached portraits, might be turned to admirable account in maintaining the interest, and enhancing the probability of an extended train of adventures.' The poet was to heed this advice in his next work—in part.

V

TALES (1812)

Crabbe had set the critical world by the ears. 'The names of Voltaire and Crebillon never divided the critics of Paris into contrary parties more effectually than this world of ours is now set at variance by the disputed merits of Mr. Crabbe.' These were the words with which the *Critical Review* (No. 35) opened its examination of *Tales* (1812). It went on: 'The most remarkable feature in the present controversy is, that both parties are right. . . . Mr. Crabbe is absolutely and indubitably a poet in the sense which his admirers annex to the term . . . yet we must confess that his general style and disposition are such as in a great degree to bear out his objectors in their refusal.' To accentuate the struggle, Crabbe himself stepped into the arena with an answer to his critics.

The Preface to the 1812 collection (No. 30) is Crabbe's most explicit and most considered statement of the principles of his art. He noticed three objections, namely, lack of unity, excessive realism and deficient

imaginative quality. Admitting the first, he yet claimed that 'something is gained by greater variety of incident and more minute display of character, by accuracy of description and diversity of scene.' On the second point he allowed that his work was not 'to be estimated with the more lofty and heroic kind of poems'; nevertheless, he claimed that faithful delineation of men and events as they are could yet be poetry, however much the critics might be reluctant to grant to a Crabbe what they would willingly concede to a Hogarth. This led him to a lengthy consideration of the last and most serious point, which had formed the core of the *Quarterly*'s strictures. Boldly ranging Chaucer, Dryden and Pope alongside himself, Crabbe argued for 'poetry without an atmosphere', claiming that faithful delineation of 'everyday concerns' might 'excite and interest [the reader's] feelings as the imaginary exploits, adventures and perils of romance'. As he told Mrs Leadbeater: 'I do not know that I could paint merely from my own fancy: and there is no cause why we should. Is there not diversity sufficient in society? and who can go, even but a little, into the assemblies of our fellow-wanderers from the way of perfect rectitude, and not find characters so varied and so pointed, that he need not call upon his imagination?'[10] And, just as he drew from experience rather than invention for his material, so also his appeal is to 'the plain sense and sober judgment of [his] readers rather than to the fancy and imagination'.[11] After this forthright apologia there were no reviewers' complaints about undue modesty in this Preface!

In some ways, indeed, the reviews of *Tales*, taken as a whole, are disappointing, particularly as Crabbe was now at the height of his fame (the collection ran into seven editions in three years). For one thing, many of the periodicals contented themselves largely with brief comment on each tale seriatim. For another, the most capable of the unsympathetic reviews, the *Quarterly*, chose not to notice either this volume or its only successor in the poet's lifetime, *Tales of the Hall*. The *Eclectic* (No. 36) remained cool: after despatching *The Borough* as 'on the whole . . . not a very pleasing poem', it thought that the new collection would hardly add to the poet's reputation. 'We seemed jogging on a broken-winded Pegasus through all the flats and bogs of Parnassus.' The *British Review* (No. 31), like the *Eclectic*, of Evangelical bias, also had faults to find, but yet had to conclude that the work was 'what no writer but one of original genius could have produced'. Here was the problem for the critics—so much power of original genius and yet so many glaring faults. Hence the opening of the *Critical*'s article (No. 35),

the most perceptive that that journal ever devoted to Crabbe and, ironically, in one of the last numbers before its demise. But, as ever, Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh* (No. 33) was most judicious—generous without partiality, critical without carping.

What others had likened to 'short stories' (the *Monthly* (No. 34)) and 'episodes from longer poems' (the *British Critic* (No. 38)) Jeffrey chose to regard as 'mere supplementary chapters to *The Borough* or *The Parish Register*' and yet, so far as structure was concerned, he expressed himself 'satisfied with the length of the pieces he has given us'. These were sufficiently 'the extended train[s] of adventures' he had requested in his review of *The Borough*; he did not want the epic that Crabbe thought he was looking for. The main direction of Jeffrey's criticism of the new volume relates to repetition: 'The same tone—the same subjects—the same style, measure and versification; the same finished and minute delineation of things quite ordinary and common . . . the same strange mixture of [pathos] with starts of low humour . . .; the same kindly sympathy . . .;—and, finally, the same honours paid to the delicate affections and ennobling passions of humble life.' In three respects, however, there was improvement—first, 'a greater number of instances on which he has combined the natural language and manners of humble life with the energy of true passion'; second, the revelation of fine feelings in 'the middling orders'; and third, the new poems are 'more uniformly and directly moral and beneficial'. Some reviews—the *British Review* and the *British Critic* (Nos 31 and 38), for example—still complained of excessive gloom in certain tales, but Jeffrey was undoubtedly right in discovering a 'more amiable and consoling view of human nature', just as he was in noting Crabbe's new interest in higher social classes than hitherto, a fact that in the *Critical*'s view (No. 35) helped to make the *Tales* less 'obnoxious' than the previous volumes. The more insistent moral purpose was widely noted, by the *Gentleman's Magazine* and by the *British Review*, for instance, the latter even claiming that the new turn had gone so far as to produce 'an unity of piety with genius'.

In one respect, however, the reviews found no improvement whatever. One after another had found faults of execution in *The Borough*—the *Quarterly* (No. 27) considered the '*costume* of [Crabbe's] ideas . . . slovenly and ungraceful', mentioning particularly his abbreviated colloquial auxiliary verbs, the *Monthly Mirror* (No. 26) noticed clumsy triplet rhymes, the *Christian Observer* (No. 29) complained of 'ill advised fondness for antithesis' which the *Eclectic* (No. 24) preferred to describe

as 'perpetual, snappish recurrence'. The last-named added monotonous versification, 'many very dull paragraphs, and numberless feeble lines' for good measure, whilst the *British Critic* (No. 28) singled out several inaccuracies of grammar and vocabulary. In the *Tales* the *British Review* (No. 31) thought Crabbe careless of all but rhyme and metre, but the *Eclectic* (No. 36) scornfully declared: 'It is nothing but prose measured, whether by ear or finger, into decasyllabic lines' and then showed the variety with which Crabbe altered the grammatical order, ignored quantity, was prodigal of triplets and alexandrines—and even then 'his verses are frequently as feeble as the following' with four lines as examples. Some of the more friendly reviews such as the *Edinburgh* (No. 33) noted Crabbe's faults of style—'not dignified—and neither very pure nor very easy', but, not possessing the animus of the *Eclectic* and no doubt by this time realizing that in this regard Crabbe was incorrigible, they contented themselves with brevity. The *Edinburgh* noticed that Crabbe's 'similes [were] almost all elaborate and ingenious, and rather seem to be furnished from the efforts of a fanciful mind, than to be exhaled by the spontaneous ferment of a heated imagination'. Crabbe's son quoted this in a note to the 1834 edition,[12] adding: 'Mr. Crabbe was much struck with the sagacity of this remark. On reading it, he said, "Jeffrey is quite right: my usual method has been to think of such illustrations, and insert them *after finishing a tale.*" '

It was not faults of expression, however, that Jeffrey chose to emphasize. He rightly stressed Crabbe's stature as an observer of human nature: 'By far the most remarkable thing in his writings, is the prodigious mass of original observations and reflections they everywhere exhibit; and that extraordinary power of conceiving and representing an imaginary object, whether physical or intellectual, with such a rich and complete accompaniment of circumstances and details, as few ordinary observers either perceive or remember in realities.' That it was which made Jeffrey remark that Crabbe was 'the most original writer who has ever come before us', and that it was in the *Tales* that brought the poet to the high-water mark of his popularity.

VI

TALES OF THE HALL (1819)

On the strength of it John Murray paid Crabbe £3,000 for the copyright of his work and published his next volume, *Tales of the Hall* (1819).

The publisher lived to regret his bargain, for the poet's tide was on the ebb. Yet Murray was not alone in his miscalculation. The new work received much fuller notice than any of its predecessors, and though old complaints were reiterated, Crabbe's stature as a major poet was everywhere recognized, and at least three periodicals deliberately examined him in the broadest context—Wilson in *Blackwood's* (No. 43), opening with a comparison of him with Wordsworth and Burns as poets of the people, Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh* (No. 44) relating the poetic gift of observation to satire, sympathy and choice of character and incident, and finally the *Christian Observer* (No. 48) considering Crabbe against the traditional criteria of the poet's need both to please and to instruct. Journal after journal, recognizing how little Crabbe had changed, assumed that there could now be no further development and summarized his qualities; and yet they also looked back and saw some change. The *British Critic* (No. 45), whilst detecting some abatement in his severity, thought him more unequal than ever, and Jeffrey (No. 44) found both fewer faults and fewer beauties. With the *Christian Observer* (which, incidentally, like Jeffrey against Wordsworth years before, used Crabbe as a stick to beat Byron, who was then bringing out *Don Juan*), Jeffrey also discovered a new note—'Mr. C. seems to become more amorous as he grows older.' The confirmation of this surmise is to be found in the account of Crabbe's life between the publication of *Tales* and *Tales of the Hall.* His wife had died in 1813, he had moved to Trowbridge in 1814, and in the next years he formed friendships with a number of young women, one of whom he nearly married.[13] In my copy of *The Romance of an Elderly Poet,* which once belonged to Augustine Birrell, its erstwhile owner has written: 'Crabbe had *good taste* in women.'

It was Crabbe's view of life, and especially his choice of characters, which occupied the critics. There was the familiar complaint that his characters were too depraved. In this respect his views of life seemed contrary to experience (so the *British Critic* (No. 45)). The *Edinburgh Monthly Review* (No. 46) criticized his lack of selection, whilst at the same time recognizing him as 'the most moral of all living poets'; it even suggested that his arbitrariness was exaggerated by narrowness, by his concentration on class rather than individuals. It was the *Christian Observer* (No. 48) that, not surprisingly, pressed home the attack. Crabbe's fascination with the unpleasant was too much even for this Evangelical journal with its proper sense of man's inherent evil. His 'favoured objects . . . are a set of low, mean, pitiful and scoundrel passions, the sordid offspring of pure selfishness . . . His very virtues

are of a creeping order; but his vices positively wallow in a kind of moral stench.' His pessimism was seen as sheer misanthropy, conveying 'an impression of the hatefulness of man, with the effect of scarcely wishing, because not hoping, to make him, by any efforts, better.' John Wilson (No. 43) in a sensitive first criticism of Crabbe, at once generous and just, answered this, using an image that comes again and again in considerations of the poet. He noted Crabbe's evident 'intense satisfaction in moral anatomy', and unpleasant though it might often be, Crabbe's poetry, he felt, opened up areas of human action and suffering new to many readers but none the less applicable to their experience: 'The power is almost miraculous with which he has stirred up human nature from its dregs, and shewn working in them the common spirit of humanity. Human nature becomes more various and wonderful in his hands . . . He lays before us scenes and characters from which in real life we would turn our eyes with intolerant disgust; and yet he forces us to own, that on such scenes and by such characters much the same kind of part is played that ourselves, and others like us, play on another stage.' Wilson also saw what others, fascinated by the evil in Crabbe even more than he was, failed to see—'the tenderness of the man's heart . . . we hear him, with a broken and melancholy voice, mourning over the woe and wickedness whose picture he has so faithfully drawn.'

Whether sympathetic or not, practically every review recognized at the end of Crabbe's career what had been evident from the beginning but what was now displayed in unsurpassed strength—the power of his observation ('he is peculiarly the poet of actual life', said the *Edinburgh Monthly Review* (No. 46)) and the depth of his pathos. It was the growth of this latter which prevented Crabbe from developing, as he might well have done, into a misanthropic satirist of the Swiftian brand. To the two qualities I have just noted Jeffrey rightly added 'the sure and profound sagacity' of many of Crabbe's remarks. Both Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh* (No. 44) and the critic of the *Eclectic* (No. 50) saw Crabbe as the greatest 'mannerist' of his time, but yet considered him inimitable because of 'his style of thought, and his materials for thinking'. The superficial manner might be parodied (as in *Rejected Addresses* (No. 39)); the essential style was beyond the reach of imitators. As Edward FitzGerald put it sixty years later in a letter to J. R. Lowell: 'Any Poetaster may improve three-fourths of the careless old Fellow's Verse: but it would puzzle a Poet to improve the better part' (No. 63g). Here, of course, lies the fundamental, and for many readers insuperable, problem with Crabbe.

His faults are all too evident; his virtues are much harder to come by, but how well they reward the effort they demand!

VII

POETICAL WORKS (1834)

Crabbe died in February 1832. Two years later an eight-volume edition of his works appeared. It contained a small collection of *Posthumous Tales* and was prefaced by a *Life* by his son, itself a minor biographical classic of the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, the greater part of the work being already familiar, most reviewers concentrated their attention on the *Life*. They had, however, to devote some space to the new poems. These had not received their final touches, but there is no reason to think that they would have been much better if they had. Crabbe had already received too much criticism for his carelessness for us to believe that he would have taken pains at this late stage of his career. The periodicals damned with faint praise (as in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (No. 60)), or simply reported, as did the *Eclectic* (No. 59), that the new work would not affect the poet's reputation either way, or, as did both the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* (Nos 61 and 55), found it decidedly inferior.

The *Edinburgh*'s reviewer was not Jeffrey but Empson, and perhaps for this reason the change of tone is remarkable. The old warmth has gone, and now we find the writer speculating on 'where Crabbe has not succeeded'. Empson, in fact, quoted the *Quarterly* of long years before (attributing its article wrongly to Gifford) and Crabbe's reply, but he came down on the side of the journal, concluding that Crabbe's 'imagination and his feelings stood him in marvellous little stead' and that to exchange the pain of fiction for that of reality is to gain but little indeed. Crabbe missed total truth, because he omitted the highest truth. Lockhart in the *Quarterly* had better things to say, emphasizing Crabbe's Christianity and the error of considering him a gloomy poet. The only other reviews which call for special mention are the American notices. That in the *North American Review* (No. 57) was very general and not very penetrating, but the *New York Review*'s (No. 62) is a systematic consideration, isolating the poet's originality, humanity, descriptive powers, pathos and religious attitude.

VIII

GENERAL STUDIES

One of the first general articles on Crabbe, as distinct from reviews of specific publications of his work, was that by T. N. Talfourd (then a mere twenty-year-old) in the *Pamphleteer* (1815) (No. 40). Apart from the youthfulness of the author, perhaps even because of it, it contains little that is remarkable. Talfourd saw Crabbe as the moral poet of humble life, inventive in his own way, but a faithful reproducer of things remembered rather than an imaginative creator.

The role of imagination, its nature or, as some claimed, its absence, is a central feature of the criticism of Crabbe, not least in the most notable unsympathetic assessments in his own lifetime, namely, those of Hazlitt and Wilson, the latter by 1827 much altered in his opinion as compared with the time when he reviewed *Tales of the Hall*. Hazlitt had characterized Crabbe as 'the most literal of our descriptive poets' in his *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818) (No. 41) which called forth a reply from R. H. Dana in an article on the lectures in the *North American Review* (1819) (No. 42). Hazlitt returned to the attack with redoubled force in an essay in the *London Magazine* (1821) (No. 52) which, with some alteration, later appeared in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825). 'Literal fidelity serves him in the place of invention . . . His Muse is not one of the daughters of Memory, but the old toothless mumbling dame herself.' Contrasting Pope's 'In the worst inn's worst room', a passage which Crabbe himself had cited in the Preface to the *Tales*, Hazlitt asserted: 'Pope describes what is striking, Crabbe would have described merely what was there'—or, changing the context a little, 'the non-essentials of every trifling incident'.[14] Varying the object of his attack, Hazlitt went on to find Crabbe 'sickly . . . querulous . . . fastidious . . . a sophist and a misanthrope in verse'. Not surprisingly—and how often the critics of the Romantic period did this—he praised 'Sir Eustace Grey'. He also praised 'Peter Grimes'; indeed, this poem and *The Village*, to which the sketch of Phoebe Dawson, incidentally, is erroneously allocated, receive a disproportionate amount of attention. The *Tales* are conceded to be 'more readable than his Poems', but the few lines that Hazlitt perfunctorily awards them at the end of the essay make one wonder whether he had read them, and there is no evidence that he even knew of the existence of *Tales of the Hall*.

Like Hazlitt, Wilson (No. 53) also felt that Crabbe was too contented

simply to delineate. His failure to select suggested an absence of purpose, resulting in a sense of 'mere miscellaneousness'. Hazlitt had enlisted Pope; Wilson cited Wordsworth: 'If we should doubt for a moment the truth of Wordsworth's pictures, as pictures of reality, still we could not question his right to make them what they are.' Including Burns with Wordsworth, Wilson contended that 'Crabbe draws the face of things—they draw its spirit.' Wordsworth is an imaginative and a philosophic poet who elevates, Crabbe 'drives out of the region of poetry' with matter fit rather for 'the Committees of Mendicity or Police'. He writes as 'a sneering cynic'. He has no sense of the transcendental; there is nothing in the causes of his events.

Wilson's view of Wordsworth and Crabbe is supported by Wordsworth's own view of Crabbe. Indeed, the Romantic reaction to Crabbe might well be summed up as Hazlitt v. Jeffrey. For Wordsworth (No. 51a) 'nineteen out of 20 of Crabbe's Pictures are mere matters of fact'; for Coleridge (No. 51m) he has an 'absolute defect of the high imagination', whilst that faithful, even sycophantic, follower of the great Romantics, Crabb Robinson (No. 51n) thought that Crabbe's poems were a very 'unpoetical representation of human life'. On the other hand, Byron (No. 51c) declared that 'Crabbe's the man', as well as finding him, in the better known words, 'Nature's sternest painter, yet the best'. In a familiar image Carlyle (No. 51i) found Crabbe 'an anatomist in searching into the stormy passions of the human heart', whilst even more vividly Landor (No. 51o), through the mouth of Porson, noted Crabbe's psychological penetration when he said that the poet entered the human heart '*on all fours*, and told the people what an ugly thing it is inside'. Croker (No. 51k) found poetical qualities to commend, but, in general, the praise derived from Crabbe's analysis of character and action.

With this in mind, one might think that Crabbe's reputation should have soared with the coming of the great age of the novel in the middle of the nineteenth century. It did not. Although *Tait's Magazine* in a fairly superficial review in 1834 thought that he had not at that time received his fair measure of praise, Gilfillan in the same journal in 1847 (No. 65) gave him a very cool appraisal. Twenty years later the *St. James's Magazine* (No. 69) granted that some doubted whether he deserved a place even in the second class of his contemporaries alongside Campbell, Scott and Moore, whilst at the end of the next decade, even though he goes on to say other things, the American critic G. E. Woodberry could write: 'We have done with Crabbe.' (No. 73). The

dismissive criticisms were familiar enough—lack of imagination, a mind 'like a camera' (Frederick Sheldon, the *North American Review*, 1872 (No. 70)), narrow range, lack of selection, absence of overmastering purpose —and for Gilfillan, little humour. Many of these criticisms are not very profound and Gilfillan's is mannered to a degree, but, because they are representative of a fairly ordinary response, they are in some ways a better measure of the average reaction than the criticism of more sensitive judges.

Some of these latter are represented in the selection of Victorian views (No. 63). They include Clough and George Eliot who recall the pleasure of reading Crabbe in youth and Rossetti who declared a present enjoyment. Tennyson and Newman expressed their love of Crabbe and Hopkins placed him with characteristic precision and economy. Of this group only John Sterling, reviewing Tennyson, felt that Crabbe failed to make that leap from the sensitive observation, understanding and appreciation of the ordinary that transforms fact into poetry. Sterling saw poetry as 'a refuge from the hardness and narrowness of the actual world'.

The real enthusiast was FitzGerald, and with the work of W. C. Roscoe and Leslie Stephen his attempts to reinstate Crabbe deserve a special mention. Roscoe, writing in the *National Review* (1859) (No. 67), provides the most balanced and discriminating assessment of Crabbe to be made after his death in the whole of the nineteenth century. He accepted that 'it is low tide with Crabbe'; he accepted also that Crabbe is a poet 'without passion', that he has no wit, humour or profundity, no reasoning or systematic view of life; he conceded that 'once become sufficiently familiar with Crabbe to know what he has written, and there is nothing more to be gained from him.' He even went so far as to say that 'he handles life so as to take the bloom off it', but two views he firmly rejected. He could not agree that Crabbe was a mere descriptive realist—'He had imagination'; and he could not agree that Crabbe was either stern or gloomy—'The only passion which Crabbe really moves deeply is the one to which he was himself most accessible, that of pity.' That phrase 'to which he was himself most accessible' is important; it stresses the role of experience in Crabbe. Most critics saw the importance of experience in Crabbe's choice of material, but they also saw it so large that it obscured the form which Crabbe's imagination took. Roscoe, to his credit, observed in better perspective and emphasized the rare quality of 'receptive imagination' in Crabbe. The passage is worth quoting at length:

This adjective indicates the nature of the faculty in most minds; it is generally to a great extent passive, and partakes of the nature of a mirror in which the images of outer things are reflected. But in some men it is a more active and aggressive power; and this was particularly the case with Crabbe. His was a grasping tenacious imagination. Little Hartley Coleridge would have called it a 'catch-me-fast' faculty. He was a man of keen observation, but also something farther; he did more than see things; he laid fast hold of them, and held them up as it were to himself for contemplation; cast a vivid light on them; and when he gave them forth again, he gave not the crude fact, but the impression he had taken of it. If he did not transmute experience into poetry, he yet did something more than simply translate it into verse.

In Coleridgean terms, Crabbe had a very sensitive and comprehensive primary imagination which did not merely observe but also held fast as mental objects what had been received in sense-perception. His secondary imagination, whilst not profoundly re-creative, nevertheless vivified the mental objects which it received from the primary imagination. This is at once the most compact and most penetrating answer I know to Hazlitt's question: 'Why not insist on the unwelcome reality in plain prose?' Crabbe wrote in verse because, as Roscoe recognized, he 'dared to be true to himself'.

This sense of himself and this capacity for seeing others and being so affected by what he saw inevitably expressed itself through his insight into character. Roscoe noticed this, and so did Sheldon in his *North American Review* article (No. 70) which in an important measure is an attempt to interpret the poetry biographically. So also did Leslie Stephen (*Cornhill Magazine*, 1872) (No. 72), who not only noted the effects that Crabbe derived from trifling incidents, the sorrows of commonplace characters and especially the 'natural workings of evil passions' ('Nobody describes better the process of going to the dogs'), but also, incidentally, refined on Sheldon's biographical theory with his emphasis on the importance of Crabbe's early environment. His final word was for the power of Crabbe's pathos.

FitzGerald was a last and lonely admirer, an enthusiast rather than a critic, who sought to rescue his idol by judicious representation. If Crabbe would not select or prune, then FitzGerald would do it for him. He chose *Tales of the Hall*, in some ways the least likely poems, for the purpose (No. 74). His *Readings in Crabbe* was privately published in 1879. I have chosen three pieces from the next decade, in one of which T. E. Kebbel (No. 76) attempts to place Crabbe in a series of 'Great Writers'. His criticism is judicious, noting the poet's roles as psycholo-

gist, moralist, narrator and satirist and seeing that Crabbe has a grasp of the tragedy of humble life, but he has to concede the poet's lack of taste and slovenly style. Kebbel makes some illuminating comparisons, not least on the tragedy of humble life, between Crabbe and George Eliot, but more striking than the likenesses is the extended contrast that Patmore (No. 75) makes between Crabbe and Shelley. The last word is with Saintsbury (No. 77), who found Crabbe gloomy, insufficiently varied, lacking in music ('You could unrhyme him'—Could you?) and pictorial rather than poetic. This echoes Sterling (and others) of generations past, and it is a true verdict, but readers of two centuries, whilst recognizing its truth, have never been happy that it contains the whole truth.

Later generations have concurred with earlier critics in generally preferring the *Tales*, and of these the most popular have included 'The Parting Hour' (II), 'Procrastination' (IV), 'The Frank Courtship' (VI), 'The Lover's Journey' (X), 'Edward Shore' (XI), 'The Confidant' (XVI) and 'Resentment' (XVII). Of the *Tales of the Hall* only 'Sir Owen Dale' (XII) and 'Smugglers and Poachers' (XX) have attained anything like the same favour. These, with 'The Parish Clerk' (XIX), 'Ellen Orford' (XX), 'Peter Grimes' (XXII) and possibly one or two others from *The Borough*, represent the best of Crabbe.

IX

CRABBE'S REPUTATION ABROAD

Reference has been made above to American criticism of Crabbe, but some mention should also be included of those articles first published in Britain which were later reprinted in America. *Littell's Living Age*, for example, published Gilfillan's essay (No. 65) (Vol. XI, pp. 1–9), Roscoe's survey (No. 67) (LX, pp. 529–46) and Leslie Stephen's estimate (No. 72) (CXXIII, pp. 403–16).

Crabbe was included amongst *The British Poets of the Nineteenth Century* (pp. 1–193), published in English by Baudry in Paris (1827–8). This extensive selection included not only *The Library*, *The Newspaper* and a number of shorter poems but also *The Parish Register* and *Tales of the Hall*. The omissions—*The Village*, *The Borough* (except for the passage on prisons) and *Tales*—are, however, more remarkable than the inclusions. In 1829 Galignani published the *Poetical Works* in Paris. Translations include that of *The Parish Register* into Dutch by Sijbrandi

in 1858 and of *The Newspaper* into German by Carl Abel in 1856. Long before this, however, in 1820, F. J. Jacobsen's *Briefe an eine deutsche Edelfrau über die neuesten englischen Dichter* included prose translations of a number of passages from Crabbe (e.g., parts of *Tales* I, IV, X, XI and XVII; the Phoebe Dawson episode in *The Parish Register*, Part II; and a number of shorter pieces from *The Borough*).

An important influence in extending foreign acquaintance with Crabbe seems to have been the section devoted to him in Allan Cunningham's *Biographical and Critical History of English Literature in the last fifty years*. Originally appearing as articles in the *Athenaeum* in 1833, this work was published in Baudry's Foreign Library in Paris in 1834. A French version came out in the *Revue des deux mondes* (New Series, IV), whilst A. Kaiser made a German translation (Leipzig, 1834). A copy of this latter was in the possession of Annette Droste, whose *Die Judenbuche* (1842) with its 'strong eighteenth-century atmosphere' of village life[15] may, though written in prose, have been influenced by Crabbe.

The French translation of Cunningham, we know, was used by the Russian S. P. Shevyrev, whilst Pushkin asked for Crabbe's works to be sent to him in a letter to Pletnev (26 March 1831). The Russian writer who acknowledges most fully his admiration of and debt to Crabbe, however, is Wilhelm Karlovich Kyukhel'beker (1797–1846). Imprisoned for his part in the Decembrist rising in 1825, Kyukhel'beker received a copy of Crabbe's poems in 1832. He was impressed by and sought to emulate Crabbe's faithful depiction of reality. The Ermil/Elisey episode of *Yury i Xenia* has likenesses to 'William Bailey' (*Tales of the Hall*, XIX), whilst *Sirota* ('The Orphan'), written in 1833–4, was avowedly based on Crabbe as a model (Diary, 16 October 1833) and recalls parts of 'Peter Grimes' (*The Borough*, XXII) and 'The Brothers' (*Tales*, XX).[16] The Russian critic, Druzhinin, published a study of *Crabbe and His Works* in 1857, and it has been suggested that through this Crabbe may also have influenced the work of Nekrassov with its emphasis on the sufferings of the peasants.[17] Whether this be so or not, Nekrassov's work resembles Crabbe's also in its facility, which reaches even to the extent of what some critics have called a lack of conscious craftsmanship. Maurice Baring, the most sensitive English interpreter of Russian literature, has made a detailed comparison, describing Nekrassov in the terms Byron applied to Crabbe, 'Russia's "sternest painter", and certainly one of her best'. He continues:[18]

He is a Russian Crabbe: nature and men are his subjects. . . . He is an un-

compromising realist, like Crabbe, and idealizes nothing in his pictures of the peasant's life—like Crabbe, he has a deep note of pathos, and a keen but not so minute an eye for landscape. . . . Nekrassov's tales, taking into consideration the differences between the two countries, have a marked affinity, both in their subject matter, their variety, their stern realism, their pathos, their bitterness, and their observation of nature, with Crabbe's stories in verse.

Much the greatest interest in Crabbe in other countries, however, was that displayed in France. *La Revue britannique* (May 1827, pp. 61–70) included the remarks on Wordsworth, Crabbe and Campbell from Hazlitt's *The Spirit of the Age*, and in February 1835 there was an article 'La poésie domestique de la Grande-Bretagne' dealing with Burns, Crabbe, Cowper and Wordsworth, drawn from the *Retrospective Review*. The editor was Philarète Chasles, who with Amedée Pichot did more than anyone else to bring serious attention in France to English literature. He translated 'Peter Grimes' (*Revue de Paris*, 22 May 1831) and in *Revue des deux mondes* (15 October 1845) he contributed an article on 'La Poésie chartiste'. In *L'Angleterre au XIXe siècle* (1851) he was to declare: 'Quant à la poésie de la prison et de la pauvreté elle est, malgré le phénomène exceptionnel de Crabbe, inadmissible dans le monde de l'art' (p. 339). Étienne also ascribed the primacy to Crabbe among 'Les Poètes des pauvres en Angleterre' (*Revue des deux mondes*, 15 September 1856), noting that 'Son observation ingenieusement descriptive est un sorte de statistique.'

Perhaps this view of Crabbe may help to explain the limited appeal that his work seems to have had among the French poets of the nineteenth century. Only Sainte-Beuve appears to have been influenced to any degree. His early 'La Plaine' was modelled on Crabbe. He had, according to his review of Lamartine's *Jocelyn*, discovered the English poet through Pichot's *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Écosse* (1825). Professor George Lehmann has described Sainte-Beuve's moral epistle 'Monsieur Jean' (*Magasin pittoresque*, 25 November 1838) as 'a kind of hybrid derived from Crabbe and Boileau'.[19]

X

CRABBE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

At the turn of the century Crabbe was included in the extensive English Men of Letters series. The volume was written by Alfred Ainger and published in 1903. In the manner of the series this work is mainly bio-

graphical but it also contains some useful critical observations seriatim. The substantial, and still standard, biography appeared a year or two later in 1906. It was René Huchon's *Un Poète réaliste anglais*, translated as *George Crabbe and His Times, 1754–1832* (1907). This book is a veritable mine of detail, but its critical judgments tend to be rather pedestrian.

Crabbe's admirers have included the novelist E. M. Forster, poets as different as Edmund Blunden and Ezra Pound and critics as unlike as F. R. Leavis and Lilian Haddakin. To the introduction to the *Life*[20] Forster brought that sensitive but penetrating ability for character-analysis that we see in his novels, noting that Crabbe extended to most of his own creations 'a little pity, a little contempt, a little cynicism, but a much larger measure of reproof' so that 'an unusual atmosphere results; it is, so to speak, sub-Christian; there is an implication throughout of positive ideals, such as self-sacrifice and ascetism [*sic*], but they are rarely pressed.' Blunden, too, in the introduction to the Cresset Press *Life* (1947) emphasized Crabbe as the poet of psychological landscape. He also, as one might expect of him, emphasizes Crabbe's love of Suffolk and the sea. The relation of character and place is prominent in Forster's second essay, or rather lecture, on the poet, 'George Crabbe and Peter Grimes' delivered at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1948.

Forster reminds us that 'Peter Grimes' demonstrates Crabbe's 'sensitiveness to dreams' and other modern critics have dwelt on this aspect of the poet's work. Patrick Cruttwell, for example, although he entitles his article 'The Last Augustan',[21] emphasizes the 'phantasmagoria of the whole of Crabbe's essential life' and pays attention to 'The World of Dreams'. This poem and 'Sir Eustace Grey' are also the particular concern of M. H. Abrams[22] as opium-poems, portraying dreams with extremes of pleasure and pain. As the only two such (at any rate known at that time) they offer, he claims, 'an unexampled opportunity to observe the effect of opium on that mysterious phenomenon, poetic inspiration'. Alethea Hayter in a later study on the same subject[23] provides a fuller examination and had the advantage of the more considerable evidence offered by such poems as 'The Insanity of Ambitious Love' and 'Where am I now', first published in my *New Poems By George Crabbe* (1960).

For many critics, however, Crabbe is more simply the last Augustan. Varley Lang ('Crabbe and the Eighteenth Century'[24]) examines the poet's affinities with the earlier period in relation to pastoral, satire, humanism and neo-classic theory. In an article with the same title John Heath-Stubbs[25] urges that Crabbe is not a pre-Romantic and argues that

his view of society is related to 'an organically conceived, functional ideal' and that his characters are directly in the tradition of Dryden and Pope. Crabbe features also as the last poet in Dr Leavis's survey of 'The Augustan Tradition and the Eighteenth Century',[26] where the very neglect into which he has fallen seems ascribable to the fact that he belonged so fully to a period earlier than his own: 'Crabbe . . . was hardly at the fine point of consciousness in his time. His sensibility belongs to an order that those who were most alive to the age—who had the most sensitive antennae—had ceased to find sympathetic.' Earlier, Ezra Pound in two short passages[27] appears to approve of the poet's Augustan affinities in first lamenting the nineteenth century's failure to follow Crabbe—'Only If'—and, secondly, in commending Crabbe's social vista.

Frank Whitehead[28] devotes a number of paragraphs to both the Augustan verse-texture and ideals of Crabbe's work, whilst stressing that 'if Augustan, he was an Augustan who lived and wrote throughout the period of the Romantic Revival'. It was Arthur Sale in his perceptive 'The Development of Crabbe's Narrative Art',[29] who decisively gave the placing of Crabbe a new direction. By emphasizing the later work he was able to isolate those qualities that have led to the poet's being considered, though not by Mr Sale, simply as a short-story writer in verse.

In an equally perceptive full-length study Lilian Haddakin among other things rejected this identification. She starts from Crabbe's insistence on 'the experiencing mind' and examines 'poetic aims and critical responses' before going on to consider what is meant by his phrase 'Poetry without an atmosphere'. She concludes with chapters on the pictorial element and the reasons why he was not 'a short-story writer who rearranged his prose in lines of a certain length'. Oliver Sigworth[31] has considered Crabbe's relationship with the eighteenth century and the Romantic movement, his achievement as nature poet and narrative poet and his critics, whilst R. L. Chamberlain[32] portrayed a richly developing Crabbe moving from a position 'hampered by Augustan modes and manners' to ever greater independence and success. Chamberlain is unusual in the high claims that he makes for the last work published in Crabbe's lifetime, *Tales of the Hall*. More recently, Howard Mills has edited *Tales, 1812 and Other Selected Poems* (1967), to which he has prefaced an introductory critical essay. The aim of the essay is stated to be an attempt 'to break open the simplifications about Crabbe, and so spread the reader's attention over a variety of critical

approaches and the variety of his work'. In so doing, Mr Mills considers poetic development and personal experience, the social element, the moral element, language and the presentation of character and dramatic and 'romantic' poetry. This introduction has several interesting insights.

XI

CONCLUSION

We come then to the summary. Crabbe was accused of narrow photographic realism, of dwelling on coarseness and depravity, of missing the highest truth, of being excessively gloomy, of being deficient in genuine imagination. That is the debit side. For the other side of the account let him speak for himself:

> For this the poet looks the world around,
> Where form and life and reasoning man are found.
> He loves the mind in all its modes to trace,
> And all the manners of the changing race;
> Silent he walks the road of life along,
> And views the aims of its tumultuous throng;
> He finds what shapes the Proteus-passions take,
> And what strange waste of life and joy they make,
> And loves to show them in their varied ways,
> With honest blame or with unflattering praise.
> 'Tis good to know, 'tis pleasant to impart,
> These turns and movements of the human heart;
> The stronger features of the soul to paint,
> And make distinct the latent and the faint;
> Man as he is, to place in all men's view,
> Yet none with rancour, none with scorn pursue;
> Nor be it ever of my portraits told,—
> 'Here the strong lines of malice we behold.'—
>
> This let me hope, that when in public view
> I bring my pictures, men may feel them true;
> 'This is a likeness,' may they all declare,
> 'And I have seen him, but I know not where;'
> For I should mourn the mischief I had done,
> If as the likeness all would fix on one.
> Man's vice and crime I combat as I can,
> But to his GOD and conscience leave the man;
> I search (a [Quixote!]) all the land about,

To find its giants and enchanters out,
(The giant-folly, the enchanter-vice,
Whom doubtless I shall vanquish in a trice;)
But is there man whom I would injure?—no!
I am to him a fellow, not a foe—
A fellow-sinner, who must rather dread
The bolt, than hurl it at another's head.
No! let the guiltless, if there such be found,
Launch forth the spear, and deal the deadly wound;
How can I so the cause of virtue aid,
Who am myself attainted and afraid?
Yet, as I can, I point the powers of rhyme,
And, sparing criminals, attack the crime.

He is the realist who recognizes universality in ordinary everyday life—'This is a likeness'; the explorer of the social scene—'all the manners of the changing race'; the analyst of character—'what shapes the Proteus-passions take'; the moralist, who differentiates 'With honest blame or with unflattering praise'; the satirist—'Man's Vice and Crime I combat as I can'; yet he is full of pity—'I am to him a fellow, not a foe'. It is probably this last that appeals most; he had such a deep and sympathetic understanding of poor, frail human nature. In our century which has seen, more than most, man's inhumanity to man, the distorted passions whence this arises and the suffering of soul and body it entails, Crabbe's portrayal of the human condition and his broad, mature wisdom ought to have stood him in better stead than they have done.

NOTES

1 F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation*, 1936, p. 125.
2 T. S. Eliot, Introduction to Johnson's *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, Hazlewood Books ed., 1930.
3 E. M. Forster, 'George Crabbe and Peter Grimes', *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951.
4 F. L. Lucas, *George Crabbe: An Anthology*, Cambridge, 1933, p. xix.
5 F. R. Leavis, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
6 Most of this section is based on investigations made by the late Mr K. Povey, formerly Librarian of the University of Liverpool Library.
7 *Monthly Review, 2nd Series, 1790–1815*, Oxford, 1955, p. vii.
8 See H. and H. C. Shine, *The Quarterly Review under Gifford*, Chapel Hill,

1949, p. 15, and R. B. Clark, *William Gifford, Tory Satirist, Critic and Editor*, New York, 1930, pp. 191–2.

9 For the background see the *Life of Crabbe* by his son, especially the beginning of Ch. VIII.

10 1 December 1816, *Life of Crabbe* by his son, Ch. IX.

11 Preface to *Tales*, 1812.

12 *Tales of the Hall*, II, 16.

13 See A. M. Broadley and W. Jerrold, *The Romance of an Elderly Poet*, 1913.

14 W. Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets*, 1818.

15 See L. H. C. Thomas, ' "Die Judenbuche" and English Literature', *Modern Language Review*, lxiv, 1969, pp. 351–4. I am indebted to Professor Thomas for help with these references to the German reception of Crabbe's work.

16 These Russian references are based on Y. D. Levin, 'Kyukhel'beker and Crabbe', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 12, 1965, pp. 99–113.

17 See W. R. Morfill, *A History of Russia*, 1902, pp. 451–2.

18 M. Baring, *Russian Literature*, 1914, pp. 229–31.

19 G. Lehmann, *Sainte-Beuve*, 1961, p. 320.

20 E. M. Forster, Introduction to the *Life of Crabbe*, Oxford World Classics, 1932, p. xvii.

21 P. Cruttwell, 'The Last Augustan', *Hudson Review*, vii, 1954.

22 M. H. Abrams, *The Milk of Paradise*, 1934, pp. 13–20.

23 A. Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination*, 1968.

24 V. Lang, 'Crabbe and the Eighteenth Century', *English Literary History*, v, 1938.

25 J. Heath-Stubbs, 'Crabbe and the Eighteenth Century', *Penguin New Writing*, 25, 1945.

26 F. R. Leavis, *op. cit.*

27 E. Pound, *The Future*, 1917, and *An ABC of Reading*, 1934.

28 F. Whitehead, *George Crabbe: Selections*, 1955.

29 A. Sale, 'The Development of Crabbe's Narrative Art', *Cambridge Journal*, v, 1952.

30 L. Haddakin, *The Poetry of Crabbe*, 1953.

31 O. Sigworth, *Nature's Sternest Painter*, 1965.

32 R. L. Chamberlain, *George Crabbe*, 1965.

33 *The Borough*, XXIV, 426–65.

Note on the Text

Reference to Crabbe's text is usually shown by giving the first line together with the numbers of the lines in the text of A. W. Ward's Cambridge edition of Crabbe. The first line is omitted in quotations from the beginning of poems and in some instances where a group of quotations widely separated in the poem cited are given together. In the case of *The Library*, which underwent substantial revision, the first and last lines of quotations are given; readers will appreciate that contemporary quotation must necessarily have been from the first edition. In a few instances where the reviewer is quoting for stylistic purposes passages are given in full.

Reference is sometimes given to long passages quoted by reviewers upon which they had made little comment. The object of this is to provide some indication of reviewers' preferences.

THE CANDIDATE
A Poetical Epistle to the Authors of the Monthly Review

(?) August 1780

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1. Edmund Cartwright, unsigned notice, *Monthly Review*

September 1780, lxiii, 226–7

Cartwright (1743–1823) is better known as the reputed inventor of the power-loom. He and Crabbe became acquainted in the late 1780s when they were fellow-clergymen in Leicestershire. (See Introduction, p. 5.)

So usual is it for a disappointed Writer to vent his spleen upon the Reviewers, that we fully expected the poem before us, judging from its address, had been an effusion of that angry passion. It seems, however, we were mistaken. 'It is published,' says the Author, 'with a view of obtaining the opinion of the candid and judicious Reader, on the merits of the Writer as a Poet; very few, he apprehends, being in such cases sufficiently impartial to decide for themselves.' And, 'as to critics of acknowledged merit (we thank him for the acknowledgment), it is addressed to the Monthly Reviewers.'

The situation which we are drawn into by this address, is such as might bring upon us, on the one hand, the imputation of moroseness, should we not be softened by a compliment which few patrons can withstand; and on the other, should we treat this epistle with a lenity which the strictest impartiality would not justify, it might reasonably be suspected, that we had suffered our judgment to be duped by flattery. To avoid, therefore, every imputation or suspicion of either kind, let

the Poem speak for itself.

> Say then, O ye who tell how authors speed . . .
> [166–211]

The Author of this Epistle, of whose merit our readers may probably by this time form no unfavourable opinion, will not, we are persuaded, think we mean

> —— to damn (as he expresses himself) with mutilated praise.

if we intimate that, beside some few other trifling inaccuracies, his rhymes are not always regulated by the purest standard of pronunciation: for instance, shone, moon, gods, abodes, &c. These are petty blemishes, which, should a future edition be called for, might easily be removed. And we would then also recommend to him to consider, whether his Poem, which bears evident marks of haste, might not admit of improvement in other respects; particularly one in which it is materially defective—the want of a subject to make a proper and forcible impression on the mind: where this is wanting, the best verses will lose their effect.

2. Unsigned notice, *Critical Review*

September 1780, l, 233–4

The anonymous author of this Poetical Epistle is, it seems, an unfortunate gentleman, who having long laboured under a *cacoethes seribendi*, humbly requests the advice and assistance of Dr. G———, and his brethren of the faculty, concerned in the *Monthly Review*. The patient, it is observable, takes no notice of us Critical Reviewers, though we have been pretty famous for eradicating disorders of this kind. When the disease, however, increases, as it probably will, there is no doubt but we shall be called in. In the mean time, though we have received no fee, we shall (like the noble-minded physician to a certain news-paper) give our advice *gratis*. Temperance in this, as in almost every other case, is

the grand specific, we shall confine our prescription, therefore, in a very few words; viz. *Abstinè à plumâ et atramento*; a safe, an easy, and we will venture to add, an infallible remedy. For the too visible symptoms of this poor man's malady, we refer our readers to the poem, where he says,

> We write enraptur'd, and we write in haste, . . .
> [57–8]

When he was young, he informs us,

> No envy entrance found, . . .
> Nor flattry's *silver'd* tale, nor sorrow's *sage*.
> [255, 257]

Sage, we suppose, is meant for another epithet for *Tale*, but surely this is a strange kind of *subintelligitur*, and our author, we believe, has no authority for it. Pretty early one morning, the Muse tells us,

> The vivid dew hung trembling on the thorn,
> And mists, like *creeping rocks*, arose to meet the morn.
> [271–2]

How *mists* can be like *rocks*, and what is meant by *creeping* ones, in particular, we cannot comprehend. Still less are we pleased with the unintelligible expressions of *shrouds well shrouded*, and *Hermes's own Cheapside*; nor are we fond of such compound epithets as, *woe-taught, fate-lop'd, song-invited, pine-prest, virtue-scorn'd, crowd-befitting*, &c. Whatever this writer may plead in his own behalf, we cannot entirely acquit him of pride, when he says,

> My song
> Shall please the sons of taste, and please them long.
> [330–1]

Though he is afterwards modest enough to add (speaking of himself)

> Faults he must own, tho' hard for him to find.
> [363]

Hard, however, as it is for *him*, faults may possibly be found by *others* in this poem. For our own parts, we cannot but be of opinion, that if this *Candidate* (which we suppose is his intention) sets up for the borough of Parnassus, he will most probably lose his election, as he does not seem to be possessed of a foot of land in that county.

3. Unsigned notice, *Gentleman's Magazine*

October 1780, l, 475

If the authors addressed agree with us in their opinion of this candidate, they will not give him much encouragement to stand a poll at Parnassus; though we join issue with him in thinking, that, 'however little in this poem is worthy of applause, there is yet less that merits contempt.' But *mediocribus esse poetis*, &c.

THE LIBRARY

July 1781

When *The Library* was published, the opinion of Burke had its effect upon the conductors of the various periodical works of the time; the poet received commendatory *critiques* from the very gentlemen who had hitherto treated him with such contemptuous coldness; and though his name was not in the title-page, it was universally known.[1]

4. Unsigned notice, *Critical Review*

August 1781, lii, 148–50

A vein of good sense and philosophical reflection runs through this little performance, which distinguishes it from most modern poems, though the subject is not sufficiently interesting to recommend it to general attention. The rhymes are correct, and the versification smooth and harmonious. The author ranges his books scientifically, and carries us through natural philosophy, physic, romance, history, &c.—What he says of physical writers is not less true than severe; their aim, says he, is glorious.

> But man, who knows no good unmix'd and pure, . . .
> Their pen relentless kills through future times.
> [364–75]

These lines are manly, nervous, and poetical. We are still more pleased with the following description of romance, which is full of fancy and spirit.

> Hence, ye prophane! I feel a former dread . . .
> Fly Reason's power, and shun the light of Truth,
> [545–82]

[1] *Life of Crabbe* by his son, Ch. 4.

5. Unsigned notice, *Gentleman's Magazine*

October 1781, li, 474

We are led through 'a mighty maze, but not without a plan,' and introduced to books, not authors, of all sorts and sizes, 'mighty folios, well-ordered quartos, light octavos, and humbler duodecimos.' These form the phalanx, or line, of the leather-coated army that is here reviewed. After these, in the rear, by way of suttlers or trulls,

> undistinguished trifles swell the scene,
> The last new play, and *fritter'd magazine.*
> [133–4]

As the praise or censure of such a crew can be of no consequence to a general-officer, we shall dismiss him without either, and consign him to the patronage of

> Some generous friend, of ample power possess'd; . . .
> Some noble RUTLAND, Misery's friend and thine.
> [667–70]

The following lines, on the subject of 'Romance' are not destitute of poetical imagery:

> Hence, ye prophane! I feel a former dread . . .
> And Fear and Ignorance afford delight.
> [545–70]

6. Edmund Cartwright, unsigned notice, *Monthly Review*

December 1781, lxv, 423–5

In the reflections with which this well-written poem commences, the Author observes the insufficiency of reason, or retirement, to alleviate the heavier afflictions of human life: and he proceeds:

> Not Hope herself, with all her flattering art, . . .
> Mild opiates here their sober influence shed.
> [28–62]

[Also quotes

> Now turn from these . . . (as in Ward, I, 529)
>
> Repent his anger, or withhold his rod.
> [234]

and

> But who are these? Methinks a noble mien . . .
> And Pain and Prudence make and mar the man.]
> [535–94]

After the specimens that have been given, to say what our sentiments are of this performance would be needless. The Reader will perceive it is the production of no common pen.

THE VILLAGE

May 1783

The Village was published in May, 1783; and its success exceeded the author's utmost expectations. It was praised in the leading journals; the sale was rapid and extensive; and my father's reputation was, by universal consent, greatly raised, and permanently established, by this poem. *The Library*, and *The Village*, are sufficient evidence of the care and zeal with which the young poet had studied Pope; and, without doubt, he had gradually, though in part perhaps unconciously, formed his own style mainly on that polished model. But even those early works, and especially *The Village*, fairly entitled Mr. Crabbe to a place far above the 'mechanick echoes' of the British Virgil. Both poems are framed on a regular classical plan,—perhaps, in that respect, they may be considered more complete and faultless than any of his later pieces; and though it is only here and there that they exhibit that rare union of force and minuteness for which the author was afterwards so highly distinguished, yet such traces of that marked and extraordinary peculiarity appeared in detached places—above all, in the description of the Parish Workhouse in *The Village*—that it is no wonder the new poet should at once have been hailed as a genius of no slender pretensions.[1]

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[1] *Life*, Ch. 5.