A STUDY
OF THE
EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY PERIODICAL CRITICISM
OF THE
POETRY OF GEORGE CRABBE

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INTRODUCTION
George Crabbe, the stern realist of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, today is a little known poet; yet interest in this "last of the greater 'classical' poets" has never actually died out. During the past hundred years he has been "discovered" time and again by scholars who have felt called upon to defend this now obscure poet who ranked, together with Moore and Campbell, next to Scott in public favor in 1810. While these discussions, practically all of which have either stated or implied that the time was ripe for a Crabbe revival, are interesting, they have added little new material to the criticism published in the early nineteenth-century periodicals; and it is this early periodical criticism that I propose to discuss. Although modern critics, with their perspective, may be better able to place Crabbe properly in literature, the early critics, on the whole, judged him well. In addition, the contemporary criticism of Crabbe's work is interesting historically, as an index to one phase of literary criticism in a period of slowly changing literary values.

The early part of the nineteenth century was not predominantly romantic. The publication of The Lyrical Ballads and the turn of the century are convenient lines of demarcation for the shift from neo-classical to romantic but actually much the same situation existed after 1800 as had existed through the latter half of the eighteenth century. Popular and literary tastes were still conservative; the popular poets
wore the poets who used a modified eighteenth-century style with "romantic" touches.3

Crabbe "more than any other [poet] carried on into the nineteenth the traditions of the eighteenth century."4 Practically all of his verse was of the old school in style and purpose: he used the heroic couplet almost exclusively and he aimed at the didactic and satirical,5 not the romantic. Crabbe did not run counter to popular tastes but neither did he fit in with them exactly; he became famous mainly because he was praised by Jeffrey, the foremost periodical critic of the age and an exponent of neo-classicism.

Literary criticism at this time was directly linked with the new development in periodical literature. Two new types of literary journalism became prominent after 1800—that of the reviews, devoted especially to critical reviews of new publications, and that of the magazines,6 considered storehouses of miscellaneous and entertaining reading material. The sale of any new publication at this time was determined to a large extent by the favorable or unfavorable periodical criticism which it received. The early nineteenth century looked not to Hazlitt, Coleridge, Lamb, and Hunt for literary guidance but rather to the standard critics of the periodicals, particularly of the three most influential periodicals—

The Edinburgh Review (1802), The Quarterly Review (1809), and Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine (1817).
Although Jeffrey, the editor of The Edinburgh Review, has been anathematized for having condemned Wordsworth and over-rated Crabbe on eighteenth-century critical principles, he was not alone in his critical opinions. The majority of his contemporaries shared his eighteenth-century bias; this fact is reflected in the periodicals of the time. Newman Ivey White, in his introduction to The Unextinguished Hearth, a collection of the early nineteenth-century reviews of Shelley's work, says "Most of the reviewers still read Rasselas and were of Imlac's persuasion as to the dangers of imagination." But Imlac and critics like Jeffrey were not entirely wrong in their distrust of the imagination. The romantics too often used the imagination as license for their excesses. The old controversy of reason versus imagination in poetry had not been definitely settled—imagination and reason were still too often regarded as incompatible, if not mutually destructive elements. Nevertheless, we are in the transition period, as the contemporary criticism of Crabbe's poetry will show. The neo-classical criticism of Jeffrey and his contemporaries is occasionally tinged with romantic doubts, particularly in the discussion of such questions as the nature of poetry and its attendant problem of the right to use new literary methods. Thus, in addition to its intrinsic worth, contemporary criticism of Crabbe's poetry is valuable in a larger sense.

*White contends that "A study of the periodicals of any age...always reveals the fact that literary tastes and prejudices change much less rapidly than is supposed by the literary historians who write after the change has been accomplished. .... The consciousness of change is but a slowly widening trickle in comparison with the main stream of opinion."

THE PARISH REGISTER
Crabbe's Parish Register appeared the last of October, 1807, but received little notice until Jeffrey reviewed it in the April, 1808, issue of The Edinburgh Review. According to the poet's son, the unsold volumes [practically the whole edition], which had been lying in Hatchard's storerooms for six months, were sold out within two days of the appearance of the review, bought, as Huohon puts it, by the "docile readers" of The Edinburgh.¹

It seems phenomenal that one article could accomplish such results, but we must remember that this article was printed in one of the most influential magazines ever published. The Christian Observer, in 1802, in commenting on the establishment of The Edinburgh Magazine, predicted that it would "gain possession of the public mind" and gain possession it did. Established as a light-hearted experiment by a group of young men interested in literature and politics,² The Edinburgh by 1808 had attained a circulation of 9,000, and probably had a reading public of around 40,000.⁵ The mysterious anonymity of the articles and the power of the editorial "we," might have been factors in the Review's immediate success, as Edward Copleston suggests,⁴ but its continued success was due to the fact that it answered a popular literary need.⁶ Unlike the eighteenth-century reviews, The Edinburgh was independent of booksellers and employed no hack writers; its competent, well-paid reviewers developed a new type of literary essay in which they gave their own independent ideas on the

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¹In his Advice to a Young Reviewer (1808), 1.
subject of the publication under discussion, as well as on the publication itself.\textsuperscript{6} And, unlike the earlier reviews, The Edinburgh noticed only those publications "that either have attained, or deserve, a certain portion of celebrity." Published quarterly, in order that its editors might have a wider selection of material and also "be occasionally guided in their choice by the tendencies of public opinion,"\textsuperscript{9} it had no continued articles but all of the articles were much longer than those of the old-style reviews. Of its two main interests, politics was more important than literature, but its Whig bias was never as strong as the Tory bias of The Quarterly. White considers that the principal fault of The Edinburgh was its

...inelasticity of taste. It failed to realize that the standards of literary judgment were being materially altered from those of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{10}

Jeffrey's review of Crabbe's \textit{Parish Register} is a case in point. Jeffrey seizes upon Crabbe with delight to show what a disciple of "the good old school of Pope" can do and ridicules Wordsworth by contrast by illustrating how his new poetic theories lead him into errors avoided by the followers of the old school. Parts of the review make us wonder whether Jeffrey is reviewing Wordsworth's \textit{Poems} or Crabbe's \textit{Parish Register}.

Jeffrey greeted Crabbe enthusiastically as an old acquaintance whose present poem would rank him as one of the "most original, nervous, and pathetic poets of the present century."\textsuperscript{11} But, because Crabbe so little resembles any of
his contemporaries, Jeffrey is forced to compare him to poets of the preceding century, Cowper and Goldsmith. Crabbe is like Cowper in his "strength and originality," like Goldsmith in his "diction and versification." While inferior to Goldsmith in delicacy and finish, Crabbe is superior to him in the vigor and truth of his descriptions. This difficulty of trying to find apt comparisons for Crabbe crops up in practically all of the reviews. He has been compared to poets ranging from Shakespeare to Erasmus Darwin, but Chaucer, Dryden, Pope, Cowper, and Goldsmith are the poets mentioned most frequently.

Although Jeffrey could find no contemporaries with whom to compare Crabbe, he had no difficulty in finding contemporaries with whom to contrast Crabbe's good qualities. Crabbe is utterly unlike...the Wordsworths, and the Southeys, and Coleridges, and all that misguided fraternity, that, with good intentions and extraordinary talents, are labouring to bring back our poetry to the fantastical oddity and puling childishness of Withers, Quarles, or Marvel. This statement is very similar to one Jeffrey made in his review of Southey's "Thalaba," in the first issue of The Edinburgh, in which he began his attacks on those "dissenters from the established systems in poetry and criticism." Jeffrey's oft-quoted opening statement in the "Thalaba" review: Poetry has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question... sounds more dogmatic than Jeffrey actually was, but it indicates
the basis for his objections to the new sect of poets. "The antisocial principles and distempered sensibility of Rousseau" occasionally exhibited in the new poetry and the Germanic origin* of the new literary theories15 were not as objectionable to Jeffrey, apparently, as the emphasis which these new poets placed on the simple and familiar. Jeffrey felt that this emphasis would not only lead to a thinness in poetry but, more important, would lead readers to undervalue the fine poetic art of writers like Virgil, Milton, Pope,16 and Racine.17

Since Crabbe excels in character delineation, however, Jeffrey, in his Parish Register review, forgets Wordsworth's unpoetical subjects and diction, as well as his mysticism,18 for the moment, and contrasts Crabbe's treatment of character with that of Wordsworth. "Mr. Crabbe exhibits the common people of England pretty much as they are" and delights by the truth and vividness of his representations.19 Wordsworth and

*Apparently Jeffrey had some idea of the theories being evolved by the German critics, for in speaking of the theories of the Lake poets, he said

Though they lay claim, we believe, to a creed and a revelation of their own, there can be little doubt, that their doctrines are of German origin, and have been derived from some of the great modern reformers in that country.

The Edinburgh Review, October, 1802, 1, 63, "Thalaba."
his associates, on the other hand,

invent...whimsical and unheard of beings...unique specimens and varieties of our kind [who] must be studied under a separate clas-
sification. ... and those who are best ac-
quainted with human nature, and with other
poetry, are at a loss to comprehend the new
system of feeling and of writing which is
here introduced to their notice. Instead of
the men and women of ordinary humanity, we
have certain moody and capricious personages,
made after the poet's own heart and fancy,—
acting upon principles, and speaking in a
language of their own.20

The objections sound suspiciously like those of a follower of

Hasselas.

Jeffrey admits the genius of Wordsworth and his followers,
and he regrets that their genius has caused many readers to ac-
cept a false conception of character and discard or undervalue
that established by preceding writers. Jeffrey contends that
Wordsworth, by refusing to follow poetic standards, has failed
in his delineation of such stock poetic characters as a
schoolmaster (Matthew), a frail damsel (Martha Ray), a school-
boy ("There Was a Boy"), and a lover ("Strange Fits of Passion
Have I Known").21 Where Goldsmith's schoolmaster and
Shenstone's schoolmistress are characterized by pedantry and
the "innocent vanity of learning," Wordsworth's Matthew is a
"half crazy, sentimental person overrun with fine feelings,
constitutional merriment, and a most humorous melancholy."
Jeffrey illustrates by quoting two stanzas of Matthew, liber-
ally sprinkled with his own italics. Of the frail damsel
Martha Ray, Jeffrey objects that Wordsworth tells us nothing
except "that she goes up to the top of a hill, in a red cloak,
and cries 'O Misery!'"22
As for love and lovers, Mr. Wordsworth illustrates this copious subject by one single thought. A lover trots away to see his mistress one fine evening, staring all the way at the moon; when he comes to her door,

'O mercy! to myself I cried
If Lucy should be dead!'

And there the poem ends!

Such representations of character and sentiment, says Jeffrey, are not
drawn from that eternal and universal standard of truth and nature, which every one is knowing enough to recognize, and no one great enough to depart from with impunity;...23

But neither is Jeffrey's criticism drawn from eternal and universal standards. Rather could it stand as contemporary satire on itself.

Jeffrey's treatment of Wordsworth reminds one of the treatment which Shelley received later from the periodical critics, who recognized and feared his genius. While Wordsworth was not politically and morally infectious like Shelley, his theories were a definite threat to the critical principles of a neo-classicist like Jeffrey. In his review of the 1807 Poems of Wordsworth, Jeffrey gives as the reason for the critics' "zeal and animosity" toward the Lake School, the fact that since "a great deal of genius and of laudable feeling" were exhibited by the new school, "we [the critics] were afraid of their tenets spreading and gaining ground among us."24
After considering Wordsworth's "childish and absurd affectations" Jeffrey turns with pleasure to the manly sense and correct picturing of Mr. Crabbe; and, after being dazzled and made giddy with the elaborate raptures and obscure originalities of these new artists, it is refreshing to meet again with the nature and spirit of our old masters, in the nervous pages of the author now before us.

From "The Village" (1783), reprinted in the present volume, Jeffrey quotes as an early example of Crabbe's descriptive powers the passage on the poorhouse, probably the best known part of this poem, since it had been reprinted in Elegant Extracts and The Annual Register, both of which had wide circulation. Crabbe's description of the poorhouse and its wretched inhabitants, who are neglected by the overseer and attended by an apothecary "whose most tender mercy is neglect," and a card-playing, sports-loving clergyman, too busy to perform weekday funeral services, is extremely depressing.

Crabbo's own early poverty-stricken life, as an apothecary's apprentice, dock hand, unsuccessful physician, and penniless writer, had given him the actual details for his realistic descriptions. His characters are the poor inhabitants of his native Aldborough, and his realistic landscapes are the dreary salt marshes and barren heaths of this bleak Suffolk seaport. Yet, Crabbe's village peasant, as Muchon noted, is the typical rather than the individual peasant—a satirical portrait somewhat like those drawn by Young—"generic and abstract," in spite of minute detail. This probably explains "The Village's"
appeal to Dr. Johnson, who read and "corrected" it.

After his discussion of "The Village" Jeffrey outlines

*The Parish Register* with its three parts, Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials. He rightly characterizes the poem as

a series of portraits taken from the middling and lower ranks of rustic life...selected ... with great judgment, and drawn with inimitable accuracy and strength of colouring.30

In contrast to his treatment of the Lake School, Jeffrey minimizes, although he recognizes, Crabbe's defects—the tedious minuteness and detail of some of his pictures; the circumstances apparently heaped up, rather to gratify his own taste than to add to his description; the low and disagreeable subjects; the sometimes harsh and quaint diction.31 Since Crabbe is aiming at a moral effect, Jeffrey contends that such defects are excusable. Jeffrey's eighteenth-century bias has here stood Crabbe in good stead.

After this general discussion, Jeffrey turns to more specific comments which he illustrates by way of excerpts from

*The Parish Register,* and "Jeffrey's extraordinary faculty of picking out the best passages in a book"32 is shown to advantage here. He begins his quotations with a passage on "the street," that part of the village in which the worst type of villager lived, to illustrate the peculiar strength of Crabbe's descriptive powers. This picture, with its minute, unappetizing details, Jeffrey thinks is comparable only to "some of the prose sketches of Mandeville."33 This comparison to Mandeville appears recurrently in Crabbe's reviews. Both
Hazlitt and *The British Critic* (September, 1819) use this comparison and *The Westminster Review*, as late as 1854, compares Crabbe's social views to those of Mandeville. The portraits which Jeffrey selects as evidence for Crabbe's power of character delineation range from such opposite types as that of Nathan Kirk, a bachelor in his dotage, who married his maid servant, to the portraits of the beautiful innocent Phoebe Lawson,* whose "ardent lover...turned out a brutal husband," and Isaac Ashford, the finest type of peasant. 34

A passage on the deserted mansion of the departed lady of the Manor, which is "in the good old taste of Pope and Dryden," shows Jeffrey's eighteenth-century bias. His taste is not purely eighteenth-century, however, in that he does not think much of the allegorical "Birth of Flattery," the verses on "Woman," or the republications, "The Library" and "The Newspaper." 35

"Sir Eustace Grey," a lyric which represents the fancies of insanity, and "The Hall of Justice," a ballad giving the history of an old gypsy woman accused of stealing bread for her starving grandchild, Jeffrey admits are powerful in their language and conception but he rightly considers them experiments. 36 Although Jeffrey may not have realized that these two poems are the nearest things to "Lyrical Ballads," in the Coleridge vein, 37 that Crabbe ever wrote, he shows his distrust of this type, especially in "Sir Eustace Grey," by his doubt as

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*The story of Phoebe Dawson was the favorite story of Charles Fox, who, during his fatal illness, read and criticized Crabbe's original manuscript.

Crabbe's Life and Poems (The Parish Register--Preface), II, 16.
to whether "there is not something too elaborate, and too much worked up, in the picture."*38

Jeffrey ends his review with the hope that Crabbe

...will soon appear again among the worthy supporters of the old poetical establishment, and come in time to surpass the revolutionists in fast firing as well as in weight of metal.39

Jeffrey's criticism is neo-classical, but it is considerably advanced over that of the critic of the Whig Monthly Review. This review, one of the most important standard reviews of the

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*The romantic elements of Crabbe's "Sir Eustace," as well as "The Hall of Justice" and the later "World of Dreams," may be the product of "opium literature" in the "Kubla Khan" tradition, for Crabbe's son admitted that his father was addicted to opium. Edward FitzGerald, one of Crabbe's editors and greatest admirers, believed that these poems were written under the influence of opium; and there certainly is a marked similarity between several passages of "Sir Eustace" and DeQuincey's "Confessions of an English Opium Eater." (See Alfred Ainger, Crabbe, 78-88) The suspended time element, a phenomenon of opium dreams, is particularly noticeable in the following stanza. Sir Eustace has been hurried along by two tormenting demons over lands and seas to a boundless plain covered with vast ruins, to which the setting sun's last rays "gave a mild and sober glow."

There was I fix'd, I know not how,
Condemn'd for untold years to stay;
Yet years were not—-one dreadful now,
Endur'd no change of night or day;
The same mild evening's sleeping ray,
Shone softly—solemn and serene,
And all that time, I gaz'd away,
The setting sun's sad rays were seen.

Crabbe was also the victim of dreams similar to those which Coleridge experienced. (See R. C. Bald, Nineteenth Century Studies,141) In his journal for July 21, 1817, Crabbe speaks of dreams, such as would cure vanity for a time in any mind where they could gain admission ....
Awake, I had been with the high, the apparently happy: we were very pleasantly engaged, and my last thoughts were cheerful. Asleep all was misery and degradation, not my own only, but of those who had been.

Crabbe's Life and Poems, I, 253.
old type, still carried considerable weight but it retained its eighteenth-century characteristics, even to the "puffing tendencies."40 The first excerpt which The Monthly critic quotes contains a number of personified abstractions41 and another quotation, from one of the occasional poems, contains a characteristic "train." The selection of this latter poem, however, was probably due to the critic's desire to correct the misquoted Latin phrase used as a motto for the poem. Nevertheless, his statement that "'The Birth of Flattery' is nearly as good as most of the allegories which have been composed since the days of Spenser" and his quotations from "Woman"42 show the trend of his tastes.

This critic feels that Crabbe's strength lies in his skillful character delineation, and in his well selected and well told incidents.43 The Parish Register is too long and some of the passages are obscure and prolix but The Monthly critic considers "Sir Eustace Grey" and "The Hall of Justice" to be quite free from the "insipid affectation" of many of the modern ballad imitators and the volume as a whole remote from the "vicious ornament and the still more disgusting cant of idiot-simplicity."44

The British Critic reviewed The Parish Register in June, 1808. The fact that this magazine, together with The Monthly Review and The Gentleman's Magazine, faithfully followed Crabbe's career from 1807 to 1834, indicates the trend of its tastes: it is the eighteenth-century type of magazine that is
most faithful to our eighteenth-century poet. The British Critic's review of The Parish Register is of small interest save that, in spite of the fact that it is the organ of the High Church party, it seems to lack Jeffrey's moral qualms. Of the passage in the "Marriages" on the old bachelor Nathan Kirk, who in his dotage had married his maid-servant, Jeffrey had said:

"The reverend Mr Crabbe is very facetious on this match; and not very scrupulously delicate. We can only venture to insert a line or two of his animated address to thus (sig) rustic Benedict."

The British Critic quotes this passage in full. The only other interesting point is the critic's opinion of the new style of poets. He hopes that Crabbe will continue to write:

"...in the names and behalf of all who peruse genuine poetry with delight, and can discriminate the strong and hardy features, the firm and vigorous step of the muse's offspring from the tinsel attire and mincing gait of the spurious brood of affectation.... Let us implore him, at certain intervals at least, to interrupt the leaden sleep, which the perusal of the compositions of modern poetasters tends to induce."

We hope that this critic is referring to the Darwins, Hayleys, and Sewards, not the Blakes, Wordsworths, and Coleridges.

The preference for sentimental didacticism in eighteenth-century style is expressed by the critic of The Universal Magazine* in his disappointment in the "Burials."

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*The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure, another eighteenth-century production faithful to Crabbe until it expired in 1814, contains selections from books and literature, accounts of new theatrical entertainments, original poetry, natural history, colored engravings, etc. Its short articles are usually very interesting, and apparently the magazine had a wide circulation.
We looked for some of those tender delineations, those moral effusions, and that spirit of placid meditation with which the contemplation of mortality so naturally fills the heart. We hoped to find some affecting narrative, or some highly-wrought picture, which might please, even after the Grave of Blair.

This writer recognizes the romantic tendency in "Sir Eustace Grey," but apparently doesn't value the romantic school any more than do most of his fellow critics. Of "Sir Eustace" he says:

...a very superior production, if we except a little childish imanity that sometimes prevails, and which we presume has been caught from the verbose and affected simplicity of Walter Scott, Wordsworth, cum ceteris paribus.

The review in The Gentleman's Magazine, November, 1807, which was the first to appear on The Parish Register, I have not mentioned because I felt that it was of slight importance. Although favorable and containing some good extracts, it apparently had little effect on the sale of The Parish Register. This oldest of the eighteenth-century magazines, retained something of its scholarship but had no real claim to the molding of public opinion. I doubt if Crabbe would ever have attained fame if he had had to depend on the standard review of the old type magazine. While the majority of these magazines were favorable, as I have indicated, and rightly recognized that Crabbe's strength lay in his character delineation and descriptive powers, and his weakness in his diction, subject matter, and excessive detail, it was the new Edinburgh which brought him into public notice over night. Crabbe was praised in The Edinburgh, in the main, for the same reasons that he was
praised in the old type magazines; Jeffrey's fear and distrust of the Lake School merely took a more violent form of reaction and attained a wider circulation. But the basic fact remains the same: Crabbe was overvalued because of his conservative eighteenth-century characteristics; Wordsworth was undervalued because he promulgated, rather than strictly practiced,* radical new theories.

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*Jeffrey realized this as well as Coleridge and later critics. In his 1807 review of Wordsworth's Poems, Jeffrey, in speaking of the system of diction which "Mr. Wordsworth and his friends" advocated, noted that it "costs them much pains to keep down to the standard which they have proposed to themselves."

THE BOROUGH
Crabbe's Parish Register sold four editions within a year of Jeffrey's review and together with Moore's Irish Melodies (1807) and Campbell's Gertrude of Wyoming (1809) ranked next to Scott's poems in public favor, and Scott was admittedly the most popular poet in "an age unusually prolific of original poetry."  

Jeffrey's recipe for popularity, which he says Scott consciously or unconsciously used, is a good indication of what pleased the public.

The most popular style undoubtedly is that which has great variety and brilliance, rather than exquisite finish in its images and descriptions; and which touches lightly on many passions, without raising any so high as to transcend the comprehension of ordinary mortals—or dwelling on it so long as to exhaust their patience. It was this "transcend(ing) the comprehension of ordinary mortals" that helped make Wordsworth unpopular. Jeffrey has been criticized for having called the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality," "illegible and unintelligible" but Southey called it "a dark subject darkly handled," and Byron several times mentioned the difficulty of trying to understand Wordsworth. Of course, neither Jeffrey nor Byron appreciated the quality of Wordsworth's genius but they probably came closer to public opinion than Wordsworth's admirers.

While the poems of Campbell, Crabbe, and Moore differed widely from each other and also from those of Scott,
they alike avoided the mysticism and brooding, dimly formulated thought of the great unpopular visionaries. They all, though in widely different ways, combined picturesqueness, lucidity, human life, and narrative incident; and while they spread the sails of imagination, they carried what seemed to John Bull a wholesome ballast of common sense.

Campbell, Moore, and Scott, of course, are better transition poets than Crabbe; nevertheless, his poetry continued to appeal. His next poem, *The Borough* (1810), a series of letters describing the scenery, inhabitants, and institutions of a seaport town, sold three editions within a year, in spite of the fact that the critics did not accept it as wholeheartedly as they had accepted *The Parish Register*. From Jeffrey on down they complained of the lack of arrangement and the choice of subject matter. The minute accuracy of description, the great satirical power, and the force of the poet's character delineation were all acknowledged, but the objections overshadowed the praise.

As a result of his doubts, Jeffrey, in his review of April, 1810, is impelled to take up the problem of the

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*The ideal transition poets, as Elton points out, are the poets who struggle against the old and the new in turn; ... they are a little but not too much, ahead of average cultured taste, and they content it greatly, and distract it from uneasiness in the presence of the solitary genius that disregards it.

nature of poetry* in its relation to Crabbe. Jeffrey contends that although Crabbe may legitimately be considered "the satirist of low life," the greater part of his poetry is of a higher order, since it represents the sorrows and joys of everyday people. And it is true that Crabbe gave evidence of his aims in this direction in one of his note-books, in which he wrote of The Borough:

I have chiefly, if not exclusively, taken my subjects and characters from that order of society where the least display of vanity is generally to be found, which is placed between the humble and the great. It is in this class of mankind that more originality of character, more variety of fortune, will be met with; because, on the one hand, they do not live in the eye of the world, and, therefore, are not kept in awe by the dread of observation and indecorum; neither, on the other, are they debarred by their want of means from the cultivation of mind and the pursuits of wealth and ambition, which are necessary to the development of character displayed in the variety of situations to which this class is liable.

Although he definitely disapproved of Wordsworth's Preface to The Lyrical Ballads, which contained a similar statement on humble and rustic life, Jeffrey apparently approved of this

*Raymond Alden, in his Critical Essays of the Early Nineteenth Century, lists the question of the nature of poetry as one of the three main literary topics that "recur repeatedly, in significant fashion, ...in the literary thinking of the period." The other two topics are (1) Shakespeare and the means of properly evaluating his works, and (2) the right to discard "the formal restrictions ... of an earlier era" in favor of new literary methods.

Introduction, ix-x.
"representation of ... ordinary persons." Crabbe's statement sounds just enough like that of Wordsworth to make us wonder how much Crabbe was indebted to Wordsworth, not only in his poetic theory but also in his practice. Crabbe's son stated that his father read and re-read *The Lyrical Ballads,* and I am inclined to think that he profited by that reading. On the other hand, it is possible that Wordsworth owed something to "The Village."

But to get back to Jeffrey and his discussion of poetry. He believes in the theory developed in the bourgeois drama that the representation of familiar things and everyday persons, if made sufficiently dignified and interesting through the selection and style of the author, produces the highest type of poetry. The imagination is set in play by the representation of such familiar feelings as "maternal tenderness ... and youthful love," and they become more interesting to us than "all the misfortunes of princes, the jealousies of heroes, and the feats of giants, magicians, or ladies in armour."**12

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*Prior to 1810, according to the poet's son, Crabbe was for several years, like many other readers, a cool admirer of the earlier and shorter poems of what is called the Lake School; but, even when he smiled at the exceeding simplicity of the language, evidently found something in it peculiarly attractive; for there were few modern works which he opened so frequently——.... Crabbe's *Life and Poems*, I, 172.

**That Crabbe agreed with Jeffrey on the Gothic novel is shown by a passage in *Ellen Orford* (in *The Borough*), in which Crabbe pokes fun at the trials and tribulations of the Gothic heroine and hero, which the reader knows will all work out right in the end. Scott quoted this passage in his review of Jane Austen's *Emma*. (The Quarterly Review (1815) XIV, 190)
Jeffrey feels that the most popular passages of Shakespeare and Cowper, and of Crabbe are based on this theory. Crabbe's story of Sally and Thomas—an engaged couple whose hopes and plans are destroyed when Thomas returns dying from a voyage, yet who find a quiet happiness in their innocent love and resignation—and Crabbe's description of the dream of the condemned felon, a dream of former happy days, illustrate the advantage of humble subjects. It is upon passages such as these that Jeffrey predicts that Crabbe's reputation will endure. Crabbe has given a juster, as well as a more striking picture, of the true character and situation of the lower orders of this country, than any other writer, whether in verse or prose; ... Crabbe, however, has erred in two ways—by describing things not worth describing, merely to display his talents, and by exciting disgust in his readers, instead of pity or indignation, by his pictures of depraved, diseased poor. Jeffrey thinks that pain is a stronger sensation than pleasure, and the more distress a poem contains the more powerfully it will attract the reader—except when it is disgusting. Even Shakespeare, "who has ventured everything," has never shocked us as Crabbe has by depicting "the crimes or the sufferings of beings absolutely without power or principle." Yet Jeffrey admits, as have later critics, that Crabbe even succeeds in interesting us in some of those excellently drawn but worthless characters; for instance, Clelia* whose story is "original and well conceived;"

*Ainger thinks that the story of Clelia's gradual degradation shows that Crabbe possessed "some of the best qualities of a great novelist." Clelia is a sort of "country-town Becky Sharp, whose wiles and schemes are not destined to end in a white-washed
especially "in the tenacity with which Crabbe represents this frivolous person, as adhering to her paltry characteristics under every change of circumstance."*17

Since Jeffrey feels that *The Borough*, with its minute treatment of all phases of life in a maritime town, cannot be analyzed, he gives characteristic passages—the sketch of the Vicar "what must be very difficult to draw;—a good easy man, with no character at all;" Sir Denys Brand, the cold-hearted town patron; the first part of Blaney's history—"a good specimen of that sententious and antithetical manner by which Mr. Crabbe sometimes reminds us of the style and versification of Pope," etc. 18

Of Crabbe's descriptive passages, Jeffrey singles out the description of an old abandoned building which serves as a lodging for the poor. Jeffrey feels that there is not, perhaps, in all English poetry a more complete and highly finished piece of painting... No Dutch painter ever presented an interior more distinctly to the eye, or ever gave half such a group to the imagination.19

Jeffrey thinks that a large portion of *The Borough* is inferior to Crabbe's previous work (notably the letters on Elections, Law, Trades, Amusements, and Hospital Governments).

* Elton says that "The decline of Clelia is demonstrated at halting-points of ten years, which affect us like a Hogarthian series." Elton believes that Crabbe's "power of working out the slow fatal mutations of ordinary character approves him by far the greatest novelist of the positive order between Sterne and Scott."

Crabbe might better have made a great deal of a press-gang; and at all events, should have given us some wounded veteran sailors, and some voyages with tales of wonder from foreign lands.20

Although Crabbe too often exhibits the worst features of such poets as Pope, Darwin, Goldsmith, and Campbell, Jeffrey thinks that Crabbe has great powers and wishes that he would apply them to the construction of some interesting and connected story. He has great talents for narration; and that 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. ...it is impossible not to regret, that so much genius should be wasted in making us perfectly acquainted with individuals, of whom we are to know nothing but the characters. In such a poem, however, Mr. Crabbe must entirely lay aside the sarcastic and jocular style to which he has rather too great a propensity; but which we know, from what he has done in Sir Eustace Grey, that he can, when he pleases, entirely relinquish. That very powerful and original performance, indeed, the chief fault of which is, to be set too thick with images,—to be too strong and undiluted, in short, for the digestion of common readers,—makes us regret that its author should ever have stooped to be trifling and ingenious,—or condescended to tickle the imaginations of his readers, instead of touching the higher passions of their nature.21

Perhaps this is an indication that public taste is shaping itself toward an acceptance of the "new" poetry. Apparently, Jeffrey is becoming less dogmatic than he seemed in the "Thalaba" review. In his review of "The Lady of the Lake" (August, 1810), he describes a true critic more as a representative of the people than as a final authority, a person.
eminently qualified, by natural sensibility, and long experience and reflection, to perceive all beauties that really exist, as well as to settle the relative value and importance of all the different sorts of beauty...

The number of intelligent judges is perpetually on the increase. The inner circle, to which the poet delights chiefly to pitch his voice is perpetually enlarging...

This is an improvement on his earlier dogmatic statement but even so it is not much of an advance if Jeffrey continues to hold to the opinion expressed in his "Madoc" review:

...new sources of poetical beauty may be discovered, which may lower the value of the old;...[but] we have no faith in such discoveries; the elements of poetical interest are necessarily obvious and universal...

The Borough to the critics of The Monthly Review (April, 1810) is the "Village, extended beyond all reasonable bounds."
The work is so lacking in arrangement that it might just as well be read backwards as forwards; the characters, although well drawn, exert no influence on each other and there is no plot. Also, Crabbe wastes too much time on minute details. While a painter may legitimately introduce such details in a picture, the poet destroys the effect of his main figures by paying too much attention to details. And, in addition, Crabbe is careless in matters of style.

Gifted as Mr. C. is with uncommon poetical powers, he will be in danger of failing to produce a great poem, unless he can brook the labour of correcting, polishing, and rewriting, and submit to the sacrifice of resolutely expunging.

This critic has been disappointed in Crabbe's letter on Elections, which he had expected to be a poetical counterpart
of Hogarth's series of election pictures, since Crabbe has so often and aptly been designated the Hogarth of Poetry;*28 and the reviewer is also disappointed that Crabbe confines his subjects to the poor.

Why is not this Borough bounded by some antient monastery, or bold Roman wall? Why is it not crowned by a towering castle, once the seat of baronial splendor and feudal contest, whose Keep secured the high-born captive, while its hall rang with shouts and minstrelsy? The history of this edifice might have carried us back in imagination to the factions of the two Roses; and, through the dismantling times of Cromwell, to the state in which its ruins might furnish hovels to the poor and vaults to the smuggler, while a few iron apartments still secured the fettered malefactor.29

Apparently this critic had a taste for romance of the Sir Walter Scott variety.

The Monthly Mirror** reviewer agrees with his fellow critics that Crabbe's "great excellence is undoubtedly the delineation of character," and he believes that had Crabbe paid more attention to the compression and finish of his portraits, his insight and delineation of character "would have constituted him the Chaucer of his day."30 He resembles Pope in some instances, but he does not have Pope's "conciseness and condensation."31 His style is diffuse, careless, and prosaic; many of his rhymes are clumsy; and he has a bad habit of punning.32

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*The Gentleman's Magazine, on the other hand, thinks that The Election "contains some truly Hogarthian traits—ut Pictura Poesis—..." LXXX, 551.

**The Monthly Mirror, established in 1795 with the principle of INDEPENDENCE as a guide to its writers, deals primarily with the stage but includes biography, reviews, poetry, etc. Some of its literary criticism is extremely good.
Crabbe's tendency to emphasize the worst side of life, The Monthly Mirror attributes to the fact that he lived in a smuggling neighborhood full of vice and poverty and, as a result, has come to believe there is little but vice and poverty in any country district. His delineation of such characters as Ellen Orford (whose miseries begin with her youthful seduction and include an idiot child, a husband who hangs himself, and a son who is hanged for his crimes) only torture our feelings.

'Terror,' says Howe, 'is a proper subject for tragedy, but horror never;' and it is the same with all poetry. A poet may be allowed to excite our pity for the pain of others, with a view to purge our own passions; but he should never put us to real pain ourselves, with no view besides. There may be 'a pleasure in mourning;' but whatever the Edinburgh Review may say, there is none in mere pain, that we have ever discovered.

In spite of Crabbe's "masterly delineation of character" the critic of The Monthly Mirror thinks Crabbe's poems "have yet been estimated too highly." Unlike Jeffrey, who feels at this time that Crabbe is "secure of keeping with posterity whatever he may win from his contemporaries," this critic believes "that posterity will be apt to look upon Crabbe's poems as we do upon the Rasselas of Mr. Crabbe's great admirer, as upon a gloomy and unedifying view of human life." In his condemnation of Crabbe, this reviewer has anticipated Hazlitt and Coleridge.

In November, 1810, the new Tory Quarterly Review, not to be outdone by its rival The Edinburgh, published an article on
Crabbe in which it, too, discussed the nature of poetry. This new review, founded in February, 1809, unlike The Edinburgh Review, was established for distinctly political purposes as an organ of the Tory party to counteract the influence of the Whig Edinburgh, which was read even in Tory households. Sir Walter Scott admitted the wide influence of The Edinburgh when he wrote "No genteel family can pretend to be without the Edinburgh Review; because independent of its politics, it gives the only valuable literary criticism that can be met with..." Scott, dissatisfied with The Edinburgh, persuaded his London publisher, John Murray, to start the new publication, which was to be independent of booksellers and conducted on a plan similar to that of The Edinburgh. Its contributors, among whom were included Southey, Scott, Hallam, Ugo Foscolo, and John Wilson Croker, were well informed and they took their criticism seriously. Nevertheless, since the political bias of The Quarterly was so strong, everything was subservient to party, and, as a result, today The Quarterly seems inferior to The Edinburgh. The government, the church, and "the majority of respectable Englishmen," however, supported the opinions of The Quarterly and probably after 1815 it exerted a greater influence on English opinions than did The Edinburgh. White says "One sturdy Briton quoted by Tennyson's father ranked The Quarterly next to the Bible." And men like Hazlitt, Hunt, and Shelley had reason to acknowledge its power.
The Quarterly reviewer of *The Borough* feels that Crabbe's success upon his second appearance in the literary world in 1808 was due to the fact that the reading public had become sick of the luscious monotony of Muses who seemed to have been fed only on flowers; and were therefore prepared to receive with indulgence even the rude efforts of a more firm and manly genius. 

The first glow of admiration, however, is now gone; and sufficient time has since passed to allow of our ascertaining, pretty accurately, the final judgment of the public respecting the merits of Mr. Crabbe. It is, if we are not mistaken, that he has greatly misapplied great powers; and that, although an able, he is not a pleasing poet.

This writer believes in the escape theory of poetry. He feels that Crabbe's insistence upon reality in low life is "hostile to the highest exercise of the imagination" because it destroys poetic illusion. According to this writer, there are two main classes of subjects that create such illusion: (1) those "that rouse and agitate the mind"—such as "epic and chivalrous romance"; and (2) those that soothe the mind—such as the pastoral. Of these two classes, the pastoral has always been more popular than the epic. This critic recognizes the possible objection to such poetry—that it tends to make our everyday affairs seem unromantic and "the higher kind of virtue" unsuitable for everyday existence—but this is the same objection that is given to all fiction—especially romance.

*Probably not the editor William Gifford, as generally believed. See H. A. Clark's *William Gifford, Tory Satirist, Critic and Editor*, 191-2.*
and this critic feels that the danger is greatly overrated. If Crabbe must depict poverty, instead of showing his contempt for its "misery and depravity," he should show that it sometimes produces the highest virtues, those developed as a result of suffering—as in the story of "Sally and Thomas." This story proves that tenderness can produce the sublime, a question raised by the critics of Longinus's age.

The Quarterly reviewer feels that realistic poetry like Crabbe's is due to a

...confused apprehension of the analogy between poetry and painting. Because, in painting, low and even offensive subjects are admitted, it is taken for granted that poetry also ought to have its Butoh school.

Poetry, however, unlike painting, "appeals to the mind alone" and words are its colours; and, this critic contends, Crabbe will not use the proper colours.

The new system which Mr. Crabbe patronizes, and to which therefore our remarks primarily refer, disclaims the attempt to disguise its studies from Nature under glowing and ornamental language. This sounds like criticism of Wordsworth's theories.

Still another of Crabbe's faults is that he deals with "a particular class of men and manners" instead of those of a general nature "which, it scarcely needs the authority of Johnson to convince us, are the only things that can please many and please long." The inhabitants of the Borough have such unusual manners and customs that it makes them seem like...
a "separate variety of the human race." This statement certainly vindicates White's contention that the critics still read Rassolas.

This critic objects to much the same things that other critics objected to in Crabbe's style. He shows a want of refinement and deals too often with disgusting depravity of character. His work is too often "circumstantial information," it is hastily written and diffuse; it is loaded with puns; and it has too many needless contractions. Yet, "few excellencies in poetry are beyond the reach of his nervous and versatile genius..." and his style in his better and more carefully written parts is vigorous, compact, and forceful. He has given us some wonderful descriptions of landscapes and the sea and remorse and madness have been rarely portrayed by a more powerful hand. Our author is no less successful when he describes the calm of a virtuous old age, the cheerfulness of pious resignation, the sympathies of innocent love.

In his best passages, Crabbe is a convert to the good old principle of paying some regard to fancy and taste in poetry. In these passages he works expressly for the imagination; not perhaps awakening its loftiest exertions, yet courting its assistance... He now accommodates himself to the more delicate sympathies of our nature, and flatters our prejudices by attaching to his pictures agreeable and interesting associations. Thus it is that, for his best success, he is indebted to something more than ungarnished reality.

*Yet, Crabbe's success in his portrayals of madness may be due in large part to ungarnished reality. Mrs. Crabbe for years suffered from a mental disorder and many of Crabbe's telling strokes may be due to his observation of her actions.
The attitude of The Christian Observer, established in 1802 to furnish such an interesting view of Religion, Literature, and Politics, free from the contamination of false principles, as a Clergyman may without scruple recommend to his Parishioners, and a Christian safely introduce into his Family, is, of course, colored by a strong religious bias. In a review of "Haverhill, and other Poems," by John Webb, an imitator of Crabbe, The Observer admits that Crabbe is a poet but one whose system "gravitates to evil." This critic is considerably irked that Crabbe is "now occupying the high places of fame with all his blushing honours thick upon him." 

In reviewing The Borough a few months later, The Observer continues its religious objections, particularly with relation to the "Letter on Religious Sects" and the picture of the clerical trifler. As far as literary criticism goes, however, it adds little to that already published by other magazines. The old complaints are echoed. Crabbe's versification is slovenly, he is too fond of antithesis, his verse is monotonous by its too frequent use of the caesura in the middle of the line, and his disregard of the principle of design mars the poem just as the lack of design marred the much more important work of The Seasons, as Dr. Johnson noted. Crabbe combines great faults and merits and "if he were a young man, and a hasty composer" The Observer would have hopes for his improvement, but he is neither. 

This critic objects to Crabbe taking his characters just as he finds them and giving all of their coarseness and depravity,
but this reviewer admits that in character delineation as well as in nature description, particularly of the sea, Crabbe paints forcefully. The material of his subjects for *The Borough*, elections, trades, etc., is so unpoeitical that it is only Crabbe's "extraordinary powers as a poet" that have enabled him to do anything with such subjects. Crabbe's poetry is for the most part inferior to that of Campbell and Scott only because of his choice of subject matter. He falls under the sentence Sir Joshua Reynolds applied to painting:

The painters who have applied themselves more particularly to low and vulgar characters, and who express with precision the various shades of passion as they are exhibited by vulgar minds (such as we see in the works of Hogarth), deserve great praise; but as their genius has been employed on low and confined subjects, the praise that we give must be as limited as its object.

Sir J. REYNOLDS' Discourse

The poetry-painting parallel, mentioned in one form or another by practically all of the critics, is peculiarly applicable to Crabbe who, in his minuteness and accuracy, seemed "to blend the province of the painter with that of the poet." Certainly if we agree with Hazlitt's explanation of the difference between painting and poetry, Crabbe is rightly termed a painter.

Painting gives the object itself; poetry what it implies. Painting embodies what a thing contains in itself; poetry suggests what exists out of it, in any manner connected with it. But this last is the proper province of the imagination.

The *British Critic* is the only review that values *The Borough* as highly as any of Crabbe's previous work. This reviewer regrets that Crabbe has drawn atrocious pictures of vice
in such portraits as Blaney and Peter Grimes but admits that the originality and vigour of Crabbe's descriptions almost excuse the choice of such low subjects. While this critic objects to certain rhymes, he points out that Crabbe's style is varied and his versification

...well suited to his subjects; easy and flowing; sometimes apparently negligent; at others pointed and neat. The reader, as he proceeds, is neither fatigued by constant exertion, nor satiated by uniformity of style; he can read the letters with as much ease as if they were prose, with the frequently recurring stimulus of poetical effect, both in the thought and in the expressions.

Thus, this critic places Crabbe's work in the field of the metrical tale where, of course, it rightly belongs.

As we have noted, the reviews of The Borough were not as favorable as those of The Parish Register, mainly on account of the subject matter of the new poem. While "The Village" and The Parish Register had both treated of some low and disgusting subject matter, The Borough's treatment assumed the proportions of a sociological treatise. The very bulk of the work made it appear tedious and high-lighted the faults of Crabbe's style, which the critics previously had minimized on account of his originality and vigour.

*John Draper, in his article "The Metrical Tale in XVIII-Century England," contends that although the work of the nineteenth century poets is thought of as lyrical, it was mainly metrical, particularly that of Scott, Byron, Wordsworth, and Crabbe, but also that of Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley.

*PhilA, LII, 390.*
The fact that these reviews were not favorable is no indication that literary tastes had changed materially. While Jeffrey is becoming less dogmatic in his theories of poetry, eighteenth-century principles, harking back to Dr. Johnson, still hold for him and for the majority of the critics. It is true that the discussions on the nature of poetry point toward the new criticism but as yet these discussions contain few new elements. Oddly enough, in criticism of Crabbe, it is The Monthly Mirror, a magazine which specialized in dramatic, rather than literary, criticism that really foreshadows the new order. The Quarterly, too, felt that Crabbe had been over estimated but its views may have been influenced somewhat by its rivalry with The Edinburgh.
In March, 1812, a new heir apparent to the poetical throne appeared in the person of Byron, who became famous overnight with the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*. Byron appealed, like Scott, through his use of the picturesque and by his "singular freedom and boldness, both of thought and expression..."; but where Scott used the romantic past as the background for his narratives, Byron turned to foreign lands. *Childe Harold* is described by The Edinburgh Review as a "series of reflections" made while traveling abroad; and it was this travel element, which appealed to England so long cut off from the continent by war, that probably accounts in large part for the immediate popularity of the poem. Jeffrey pointed out that it was surprising that the poem "should please and interest so much with so few of the ordinary ingredients of interest or poetical delight. There is no story or adventure," no incidents, and no characters except its misanthropic hero. And what makes the appeal of the poem still more surprising is the fact that Byron voices sentiments that run counter to public opinion and prejudice.

Lord Byron speaks with the most unbounded contempt of the Portuguese—with despondence of Spain—and in a very slighting and sarcastic manner of wars, and victories, and military heroes in general. Neither are his religious opinions more orthodox, we apprehend, than his politics; ... Jeffrey, in his review of "The Corsair," felt that the public demand for strong sensation accounted in part for Byron's popularity.
... poetry does not disdain, in pursuit of her new idol of strong emotion, to descend to the very lowest conditions of society, and to stir up the most revolting dregs of utter wretchedness and depravity.

This is the age to which we are now arrived: and ... the poet who has devoted himself most exclusively, and most successfully, to the delineation of the stronger and deeper passions, is likely to be its reigning favourite. ... Instead of ingenious essays, elegant pieces of gallantry, and witty satires all stuck over with classical allusions, we have, in our popular poetry, the dreams of convicts, and the agonies of Gypsy (sic) women,--and the exploits of buccaneers, freebooters, and savages--and pictures to shudder at, of remorse, revenge, and insanity--and the triumph of generous feelings in scenes of anguish and terror--and the heroism of low-born affection and the tragedies of vulgar atrocity (sic).

Crabbe, the creator of "dreams of convicts, and the agonies of Gypsy women," as well as "pictures ... of remorse, revenge, and insanity," also published a volume of poetry in 1812. His Tales in Verse, of a piece with his previous work, although dealing more with the middle classes, appeared in September of that year.

In the preface to his new work, Crabbe discusses two points brought up by the critics of The Borough: (1) the possibility of his composing a long, well-unified work with a central catastrophe and incidents and characters all working toward this catastrophe; and (2) the question of his right to the title of poet. Regarding the first point, Crabbe states that he would like to be able to compose a long well-unified work but that he simply is not fitted for such a task;* he must deal with smaller

*Undoubtedly, Crabbe's novel-writing experience prior to the publication of The Parish Register had convinced him of his inability to deal with long narratives and complicated plots. The three completed novels which Crabbe destroyed on his wife's advice probably were not as good as his poetry, as his wife contended, but it is tantalizing to think that they might have been good psychological novels.
groups. He defends his smaller groups, however, by pointing out that they gain by "greater variety of incident and more minute display of character, by accuracy of description and diversity of scene..." Crabbe recognizes the lack of unity in his tales and he admits that he might have followed the examples of Chaucer or Boccaccio and connected the tales, but he feels that such a connection is artificial.  

While Crabbe admitted his inability to deal with large groups, he had advanced in the art of story telling. From his generic sketch of the poor peasant in "The Village" through his portraits in The Parish Register and the more fully developed character sketches in The Borough, Crabbe had evolved his metrical tale in which two characters "act and react on each other..." Those stories, which are powerful fiction in the Thomas Hardy vein rather than poetry, may be divided into three parts: (1) the opening statement, a portrait of the main character, giving weak and strong points, (2) the plot—which evolves from some "unforeseen incident," and (3) the catastrophe which is the result of this incident and the reaction of the persons involved. All of the stories are variations of the single theme of happiness and exhibit Crabbe's firm belief that happiness depends entirely on the individual—chance never enters into it.  

As to the second problem raised by the critics of The Borough, the question of Crabbe's claim to the title of poet, he admits that his poems can't pretend to be ranked "with the more lofty and heroic kind of poems," but he is reluctant to admit that
they have not a fair and legitimate claim to
the poetic character; in vulgar estimation, indeed, all that is not prose passes for
poetry; but I have not ambition of so humble
a kind as to be satisfied with a concession
which requires nothing in the poet, except
his ability for counting syllables; and I
trust something more of the poetic character
will be allowed to the succeeding pages, than
what the heroes of the Dunciad might share
with the author; nor was I aware that, by de-
scribing, as faithfully as I could, men,
manners, and things, I was forfeiting a just
title to a name which has been freely granted
to many, whom to equal, and even to excel, is
but very stinted commendation.

He thinks that he is a poet in spite of the fact that he doesn't
fit the definition given by Shakespeare in a *Midsummer Night's
Dream*. He admits that the productions of poets who do fit this
definition are "a higher and more dignified kind of composition,
nay, the only kind that has pretensions to inspiration; ..." but
he is unwilling to exclude from the title of poet those writers
who appeal "to the plain sense and sober judgment of their
readers, rather than to their fancy and imagination, ..." If
such writers are excluded, a great deal of what was once con-
sidered poetry will be discarded—particularly that kind of
satire noted for its skillful delineation of character. Much
of Chaucer's poetry is "of this naked and unveiled character..
[with] coarse, accurate, and minute, but very striking descrip-
tion." Dryden's poetry is characterized by its "force of ex-
pression and accuracy of description" rather than its fancy.
And, to bring forward one other example, it will be found that Pope himself has no small portion of this actuality of relation, this nudity of description, and poetry without an atmosphere; the lines beginning, 'In the worst inn's worst room,' are an example, and many others may be seen in his Satires, Imitations, and above all in his Dunciad: ... 

Where Dr. Johnson felt that it would be difficult to form a definition of poetry which would exclude Pope's work, others have proposed definitions that would relegate him to the class of "elegant versifier." 

This question, of course, goes back to the controversy started by Joseph Warton in his *Essay on Pope* (1756) in which he questioned the supremacy of Pope as a poet. Warton contended that Pope was superior in the kind of poetry that he wrote but that it wasn't the highest kind of poetry. He was not transcendentally a poet—he had nothing pathetic or sublime in his poetry—and he lacked the invention and imagination which are the chief faculties of a poet. 

William Lisle Bowles in his edition of Pope (1807) stirred up the old controversy, which had never quite died down, by his statement that all

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*Alfred Ainger (Crabbe, 125) says that in the discussion of the poetic worth of Chaucer and Pope, Crabbe failed to see the difference between these poets and himself. He lacked Chaucer's "humour and pathos" and Pope's "mastery of form," although his keen-sighted delineation of character will bear comparison with that of Pope's. I don't agree with Ainger on this point. Crabbe, in his preface, says definitely that it is some comfort to him to note that "men much his superiors" have likewise been refused the rank of poet, while "men not much his superiors" have been given such rank.*

*Life and Works, IV, 140.*
images drawn from the beautiful and sublime in nature are more poetical than those derived from art; and, in like manner, all passions of the human heart taken from nature are more poetical than those taken from incidental manners. This question flared up again in 1819 with the publication of Thomas Campbell's Specimens of the English Poets and at that time Byron joined Campbell in defense of Pope. Jeffrey in The Edinburgh Review of November, 1812, agrees with Crabbe that he is a poet. He says that Crabbe's distinguishing excellence is his extraordinary power of description, a power which, though often greatly misapplied, must forever entitle him to the very first rank among descriptive poets; and, when directed to worthy objects, to a rank inferior to none in the highest departments of poetry. He believes that Crabbe is one of the most original of writers and that his writings "are destined to a still more extensive popularity than they have yet obtained..." Jeffrey once again points out that style and versification are secondary in such an author. His style, while not dignified, is forceful, precise, and familiar; and occasionally, in the delineation of despair, he reaches the sublime. He too often neglects his versification and his diction, however, in his effort to give complete and accurate descriptions. The sonorous verse of "The Village" and the rich melody of "Sir Eustace Grey" show his poetry at its infrequent best.

*The Edinburgh, as could be expected, came to Pope's defense. This magazine complains that Pope is attacked on "false principles of criticism." While he was not gifted "for the epic, the tragic, or the lyric muse... no critic of taste and candour could refuse the name of poet to one so highly gifted by nature, and so improved by skill." The Edinburgh Review, XI, 412 (January, 1808) Bowles's "Edition of Pope."
Jeffrey says that what he had hoped for, when, in his re-
view of *The Borough*, he had urged Crabbe to write a well unified
story, was not an epic, as Crabbe seemed to think, but a poem
embodying

a little more of the deep and tragic passions—
of those passions which exalt and overwhelm the
soul—to whose stormy seat the modern muses can
so rarely raise their flight—and which he has
wielded with such terrific force in his *Sir
Eustace Grey*, and the *Gipsy Woman*. What we
wanted, in short, were tales something in the
style of those two singular compositions—with
less jocularity than prevails in the rest of his
writings—rather more incidents—and rather few-
er details.16

Crabbe's statement in the Preface that his poems are moral
is noticed by Jeffrey who prided himself on his ethical criti-
cism. From the first issues of *The Edinburgh* he had attacked
works like Moore's "Anacreonic Odes" and praised Miss Edgeworth's
morals. He says that Crabbe's present work "may be ranked by
the side of the inimitable tales of Miss Edgeworth; ..." Where
her moral lessons are primarily for the upper classes; Crabbe's
are for the middle classes, whose emotions, Jeffrey still thinks,
are "best fitted for poetical or pathetic representation."
Since the middle classes are most familiar with the emotions and
objects that Crabbe describes, Jeffrey feels that they should be
best able to appreciate Crabbe's poetry. Jeffrey admits, how-
ever, that the middle classes are apt to be more interested in
characters of high rank.17

The critic of *The Monthly Review* seems slightly amused at
Crabbe's evident distress over the question of his poetical
rank. Admittedly "a faithful delineator of men, manners, and
things," why isn't he a poet? *The Monthly* can't venture to
foresee posterity's judgment but it feels that when
his name is struck off the roll of poets not only Romeo's Apothecary, and Chamont's Witch, Pope's Sir Balham, and his Death of Buckingham, but the better half of Shakespeare's plays, must no longer bear the name of poetry.18

The public thinks Mr. Crabbe is a poet and this volume isn't likely to change its belief.

The Monthly speaks of The Quarterly's complaint that Crabbe's "fiction is too perfect; that the legitimate object of poetry is to deceive the reader, and that ... the deception becomes faulty when it most nearly resembles reality...."

This critic doubts whether the enumeration of minute details increases the appearance of reality; ordinarily, a person relating facts would omit such details. Richardson may be excused for describing china cups and chintz furniture because he needs to create an intimacy between his readers and characters that will last through nine volumes.

Teniers and Wilkie ... may minutely delineate pots, pans, and cabbages... because all these things may be kept in due subordination to the principal purpose and leading effect of the respective pictures.

If a poet devotes as much space to the enumeration of minute details as he does to the important events which arouse the feelings, however, he lays himself open to the parody so characteristic of this age.19

The Monthly is obviously referring to Rejected Addresses (1812), a series of delightful parodies of the famous authors of the day, purporting to be the addresses they had submitted
in a prize contest for an address to open the New Theatre in Drury Lane. Practically all the magazines feel that "The Theatre" by the Rev. G. Crabbe is the best piece. The Monthly Review says that

the story of the loss of Pat Jennings's hat, which drops from the upper into the lower gallery, for plain vulgar flatness of idea and expression, is unequalled even by the choicest specimens in the 'Borough' or the 'Tales.' Why will an author, who abounds in beautiful passages, voluntarily degrade his poetical character, by a false estimate of the merit of being quite homespun and natural... Why be content to lose the world for a poorhouse?

'Up soars the prize; the youth, with joy unfeign'd,
Regain'd the felt, and felt what he regain'd.'

The Quarterly feels that although "The Theatre" is a masterly imitation of Crabbe it is hardly a caricature because it is so like his original work. Crabbe, himself, admitted that the authors of these verses had done him admirably.

The Universal Magazine's discussion of Crabbe's poetic worth is extremely interesting. It contends that although Crabbe may not belong to the highest order of poetry, he is a genuine poet with an exalted rank among modern poets and with a "kindred resemblance" to Shakespeare.

Where Crabbe's earlier poems were galleries of portraits, his present volume is a narrative with "connected trains of character and incident."
This sort of poetical novel-writing, of which the history of literature furnishes so few examples, is, we apprehend, governed by the same principles as its kindred composition in prose, but susceptible of greater dignity. Verse always adds to the importance and impressiveness of every subject on which it is employed.  

This critic goes back to the comparison of Crabbe with Dryden and Pope. Although inferior in variety and polish to Dryden and Pope, Crabbe is, in some ways, superior to them both.

Mr. Crabbe has not only the merit of describing natural emotions and external objects with as much spirit as either, and with more correctness, but he has succeeded in one of the higher provinces of poetry, which Dryden knew himself too well to attempt, and which Pope has attempted almost in vain. Nothing—no, not even the magical scenes of Otway, can surpass the intense and irresistible pathos of some of our author’s delineations, heightened as that pathos is by that stern truth and that devoted fidelity of expression which form the basis of all his designs.

If Crabbe has failed in the distinguishing characteristics of his predecessors and rivals, his failure proceeds, in a great measure, from his not aiming at them, and from his having followed the inclination of his genius in the pursuit of different and incompatible objects.

And lastly, Crabbe, like Miss Edgeworth, is interested in the "moral improvement" of his race. "Never was fiction rendered a more powerful ally to truth, never poetry a clearer guide to practice..." This emphasis on the moral side of poetry, which was becoming increasingly evident in the reviews, was later to find its peak in the almost hysterical disapproval of Byron's Don Juan. This moral emphasis was, of course, the result of the growing public fear of political, moral, and religious disaffection, which evidenced itself in such absurdities as the
"Society for the Prevention of Vice."

The reviews of *Tales in Verse*, as the foregoing examples have shown, were much more favorable than those of *The Borough*. Not only did Crabbe's moral purpose find favor with the critics, but also his subject matter and style. Crabbe, while admittedly not an even writer, was granted the rank of poet.
TALES OF THE HALL
Tales in Verse proved popular, five editions being called for by 1814, and on the basis of its popularity Murray offered Crabbe £5,000 for Tales of the Hall (1819) and the copyright to the former volumes. Popular tastes had definitely changed between 1812 and 1819, however; one edition of the tales was more than sufficient and Murray lost heavily.\(^1\) There were various causes underlying this change in public taste. For one thing, popular demand for poetry, which had reached its height in 1815, had fallen off. Blackwood's in 1817 announced, with some exaggeration, that poetry had had its day,\(^2\) and Southey, a decade later, said that there was no poetry in circulation except that in the Annuals—which were still bought as presents.\(^3\)

Prose definitely had a wider appeal than poetry around 1820 and Scott through his novels took back the literary supremacy he had lost to Byron in 1812. Byron's melancholy passionate heroes had made the public somewhat indifferent to Crabbe's humble characters;\(^4\) now Scott's exciting novels operated against Crabbe by luring away the fiction readers who had been a large part of his public. Among the popular poets, Mrs. Hemans and Letitia Landon pushed Crabbe into the background by satisfying the taste for the sentimental\(^5\) as he never could have. Shelley and Keats, though not popular, also worked against Crabbe by exhibiting in their poetry rich varieties of verse which by contrast made Crabbe's dull couplets seem duller.\(^6\)

It is a strange thing that among these influences operating against Crabbe, Byron and Scott, who reverenced and admired him,
should have played such a large part. Byron, particularly, from
*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* on, always expressed his ad-
miration for Crabbe's genius and in the continuation of the Pope
controversy, which we have already noticed, more than once men-
tioned Crabbe as a worthy follower of Pope. In 1817 he wrote
that he was convinced, from a comparison of his own work and
that of his contemporaries with Pope's, that the nineteenth
century was on "a wrong revolutionary poetical system, not worth
a damn in itself, and from which none but Rogers and Crabbe are
free." 7

In 1820 he said

the present deplorable state of English poetry
is to be attributed to that absurd and system-
atic depreciation of Pope... Men of the most
opposite opinions have united upon this topic.
Warton and Churchill began it... the most per-
fected and harmonious of poets—he who, having
no fault, has had REASON made his reproach—
was reduced to what they conceived to be his
level; but even they dared not degrade him be-
low Dryden, Goldsmith, and Rogers, and
Campbell, his most successful disciple; and
Hayley who, however feeble, has left one poem
that will not be willingly let die... kept up
the reputation of that pure and perfect style;
and Crabbe, the first of living poets, has
almost equalled the master. 8

This controversy, of which there are frequent reminders in the
magazines of the period, is a good index to critical thought.

Pope could be considered a corrective* not only to the faults

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*In criticizing Southey's *Ladoa* (October, 1805), Jeffrey
had contended that if Southey "were to write in the measure of
Dryden or Pope ... he would be sooner struck with his own
exuberance and prolixity."

of the great poetry of the day but also to the inanity of the third-rate poetry that was so popular. 3

Save for his connection with the Pope controversy, criticism of Crabbe doesn't fit in so well with the main critical tendencies of this period, which were strongly biased by political, religious, and social fears, 10 results of the French Revolution. Crabbe was inoffensive on all counts.

Of the major poets, Byron, admittedly occupying "the throne of poetical supremacy," 11 suffered least at the hands of these biased reviewers. The objections to his poetry were mainly moral, and even when the critics objected to his morals, they admitted his genius. Don Juan was described as having an "intense infusion of genius and vice," by Blackwood's, which admitted a few years later that the vice had been "exaggerated by the fastidious prudery of this age." 12

...in spite of all the critics can do or refrain from doing, nothing can possibly prevent [it] from taking a high place in the literature of our country... 13

Likewise Cain contains fine poetry but is a blasphemous performance. 14

Shelley was probably next best treated. He was acknowledged to be "a true Poet" but one whose political and moral principles were at fault. 15 Alastor was too obscure but had the poetic spirit. 16 Rosalind and Helen exhibited

*The Edinburgh also felt that the prudery was too exaggerated; it speaks disparagingly of Southey's preface to a Vision of Judgment, "an edifying discourse on the Satanic School of Poetry."

Edinburgh Review, XXXV, 422.
a strange perversion of moral principle--a wilful misrepresentation of the influence of the laws of human society on human virtue and happiness ... by representing laws as the inventions and juggleries of tyranny and priestcraft. And

hatred and contempt of priests ... is but a short step to ... hatred and contempt of all religion.

Yet in the Revolt of Islam he "approaches more nearly to Scott and Byron than any other of their contemporaries." Scott was essentially inoffensive as far as the fears of this period were concerned, although The Edinburgh might have appreciated him more if he had been a Whig. His poetry continued to get good reviews, although the reviewers realized that his later poems, Rokeby, Lord of the Isles, etc. were not as good as The Lady of the Lake and Marmion. His novels, of course, were genuinely appreciated.

Wordsworth continued to be depreciated by Jeffrey as late as 1815, but with the advent of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, (1817), he began to come into his own. This new Tory magazine, established in 1817, was never to exert an influence comparable to that of The Edinburgh and The Quarterly but it contained a more miscellaneous collection of subject-matter. In addition to the reviews and political articles, it published short stories, novels, poetry, papers on foreign literature, etc. Its style even today is stimulating. Its criticism, however, was more startling than reliable, as its attacks on Words and the Cockney School, for which it is particularly notorious,
will show. Nevertheless, prejudiced as many of its reviews were, this magazine recognized the genius of Shelley and Wordsworth, and later Coleridge. It was the first periodical to consistently praise Wordsworth, largely, of course, on account of John Wilson (Christopher North), for many years the guiding spirit of Blackwood's, who genuinely appreciated Wordsworth's poetry. Wilson recognized the cause of Wordsworth's unpopularity in his contemplative philosophy which was at variance with the English mind, and as a result of his unpopularity, Wordsworth "has taken him to the air above us, where he finds serene joy in the consciousness of his soaring."

Coleridge received little notice from the reviewers and what he received was disparaging, mainly. Biographia Litoraria was "most execrable ... from a literary point of view" according to Blackwood's.

Keats, Hunt, and Hazlitt were attacked by Blackwood's as members of the "Cockney School." These reviews were unfortunate in that they noticed the superficial blemishes of these poets—their diction and unpoetic subjects—blemishes which they were outgrowing. The original cause of the attacks was political, due to Hunt's connection with the Liberal party, but there was also a social prejudice behind the attacks—the Cockneys were vulgar and low bred. Blackwood's review of Rimini attacks

*Syron in 1820 wrote

the new ... school are most vulgar, .... Far be it from me to presume that there ever was, or can be, such a thing as an aristocracy of poets; but there is a nobility of thought and of style, open to all stations, and derived partly from talent, and partly from education,—which is to be found in Shakespeare, and Pope, and Burns, no less than in Dante and Alfieri, but which is nowhere to be perceived in the mock birds and bards of Mr. Hunt's little chorus.

Byron's Letters and Journals. V. 591.
Hunt on the basis of his low birth and lack of education.\textsuperscript{31}

Byron and Campbell in addition to their social prejudice were aroused by their belief that the Cockneys were against Pope,\textsuperscript{32} and certainly in "Sleep and Poetry" Keats attacked the Pope tradition. \textit{Blackwood's} specifically mentions Keats's abuse of Pope and Boileau.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{The Quarterly} also attacked the Cockney school. Hunt will live and die unhonoured in his own generation, and, for his sake it is hoped, moulder unknown in those which are to follow.\textsuperscript{34}

Keats is characterized as a "copyist" of Hunt. \textit{The Quarterly} reviewer (Croker?) in criticizing \textit{Endymion} admits that he read only the first book of \textit{Endymion} but says that he knows no more of the first book than of the three he didn't read.\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{The Edinburgh}, on the other hand, is

\begin{quote}
struck with the genius these volumes display, and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their extravagance. ... they are flushed all over with the rich lights of fancy, and so coloured and bestrewn with the flowers of poetry, that .... it is impossible to resist their .... enchantments.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

This sounds encouraging for criticism but how much \textit{The Edinburgh} actually appreciated the poetry and how much it aimed at discountenancing \textit{Blackwood's} and \textit{The Quarterly} is a moot question.

Of the genuinely new criticism there are only occasional glimpses, such as that of Hazlitt in his "Characters of Shakespeare." \textit{The Edinburgh}, not ready to accept such critical principles, pointed out rather sarcastically that it is not so much what Hazlitt
knows about Shakespeare or his writings ....

as what he feels about them—and why he feels so—and he thinks all who profess to love poetry should feel so likewise.37

While criticism of Crabbe is not the "new" criticism, it is as unbiased as any of the period, since he was not politically, socially, or morally infectious. The fact that the criticism was favorable might have been due in part to the patriarchal attitude with which Crabbe was regarded by the critics and other writers. Be that as it may, the criticism is favorable, on the whole. While the critics once again point out that Crabbe seldom attains the loftiest poetic heights, they admit that he is the "best portrait-painter" of the age. And Tales of the Hall, which deals with the middle classes, contains more pleasing, although fewer powerful, portraits than any of Crabbe's previous volumes.

In Tales of the Hall, Crabbe, apparently trying to follow the advice of his critics, has managed a connecting link for his stories through the medium of two half-brothers who meet after not having seen each other since their youth, and, during a companionship of several weeks, relate their own life histories and those of friends and acquaintances. This is a simple scheme but somewhat in advance of Crabbe's former works.

The Gentleman's Magazine, as usual, is one of the first to notice the new publication and it mentions favorably the connecting link, which it considers to be "dramatic" in the Canterbury tradition.38 This more or less routine review
devotes most of its space to excerpts but it is interesting to note that in the same volume Byron's Mazepa and Don Juan get much less favorable notice, the latter of course on moral charges, while a reprint of Wordsworth's Waggoner is passed by with the remark that it is "simply elegant and unaffected." Blackwood's, also in the month of July, reviewed the Tales in an article, by Wilson, comparing Burns, Wordsworth, and Crabbe as the three great poets of the poor. Wilson emphasizes the fact that Burns, Wordsworth, and Crabbe, unlike the other great poets of the age, have not used foreign countries or romantic history for their inspiration but the common everyday feelings of their countrymen.

This review contains some exceedingly good observations on all three of these poets, but is particularly good in the appreciation of Wordsworth, who, in spite of his unpopularity has exerted a power over the mind of his age, perhaps, of deeper and more permanent operation than that of all the rest of the poetry by which it has been elevated and adorned. There is not a man of poetical genius in Britain who is not under manifold obligations to his pure and angelic muse; ... Wilson uses the contrast between Wordsworth and Crabbe to bring out their individual characteristics more strongly. He rightly recognizes in Wordsworth's self-abstraction and mysticism a cause of his unpopularity. Like Crabbe, Wordsworth is to a certain extent "aloof from the subject of his description," but while Crabbe is satirical, Wordsworth is benign. With him, poetry is not an accurate picture of vice or misery but a true
and beautiful reflection of life; his poetry cheers and consoles—Crabbe's depresses.45

Cra[bbe is, confessedly, the most original and vivid painter of the vast varieties of common life, that England has ever produced, and while several living poets possess a more splendid and imposing reputation, we are greatly mistaken if he has not taken a firmer hold than any other, on the melancholy convictions of men's hearts ruminating on the good and evil of this mysterious world.46

While he is the "best portrait-painter" of the age, having produced a whole gallery of full-length, minutely detailed portraits, Wilson feels that "the very highest poetical enthusiasm is not compatible with such exquisite acuteness of discernment."47

Jeffrey, in his review, also in July, sticks to his early contention that Crabbe's stylistic mannerisms, prosaic verse, jingling versification, etc. are not characteristic of his best work, "some of the most original and powerful poetry that the world ever saw." His "power of observation," and his understanding of character, combined with his ability to write with tenderness and pathos, have produced his best poetry.

Add to all this the sure and profound sagacity of the remarks with which he every now and then startles us in the midst of very unambitious discussions;—and the weight and terseness of the maxims which he drops, like oracular responses, on occasions that give no promise of such a revelation;--and last, though not least, that sweet and seldom sounded chord of lyrical inspiration, the lightest touch of which instantly charms away all harshness from his numbers, and all lowness from his themes—and at once exalts him to a level with the most energetic and inventive poets of his age.48
Unfortunately, Crabbe is a spectator of life, not a participant, and he regards his subjects satirically. By introducing ridicule into his pathos, he sometimes makes us regard his situations and characters as we regard real life and human nature—with "mingled feelings of compassion and amusement." 49

Jeffrey repeats the old complaint that Crabbe does not select his characters carefully enough but Jeffrey admits that the present volume has less of the disgusting, although less of the powerful, than Crabbe's previous volumes. 50

In the present volume there are several lyric passages that Jeffrey notes particularly—one a song that reminds him of Moore's lyrics, although he admits that he had previously considered Crabbe and Moore totally unlike; 51 the other, a melancholy lyric in which a young woman, whose mind is almost unbalanced, longs for death. Jeffrey considers this passage "eminently beautiful" and regrets "that Mr. Crabbe should have indulged us so seldom with those higher lyrical effusions." 52

The British Critic, September, 1819, says that the "power of [Crabbe's] genius not unfrequently dashes aside all our prejudices," 53 but apparently not often, for the prejudices of this magazine are many. It uses the old stock comparison of the Flemish versus the Italian school—with Crabbe's Flemish pictures contrasted to the Italian selected, blended, "imaginary whole." 54 This reviewer complains that Crabbe gives offensive details just because they're natural; he doesn't use
the imagination but just takes things as he finds them. The tragic story of Ruth, who drowns herself to escape the pursuit of a horrible preacher, might be a newspaper item, the minutes of a coroner's jury, or a village gossip's story. It harrows our feelings "without producing a correspondent moral effect." Crabbe's doctrine of man's depravity, like Hobbes's doctrine and Mandeville's social plan, is not suitable for poetry, since the end of poetry is to give pleasure. Yet the Critic admits that Crabbe compels our interest by his broad strokes. The above remarks, particularly the reference to Ruth and Mandeville, make me suspect that this critic is quoting Hazlitt's lectures on the English poets.

This reviewer thinks that Crabbe's versification is often "the most untunable in our language, the merest scrannel scraping that ever grated on mortal ear. Quarles is an Apollo to this Pan." Yet, amazingly enough, when he uses any metre other than the heroic, his verse "becomes rich music." This critic reproduces, as evidence, the same two lyrical passages that Jeffrey noticed.

The review of The Christian Observer, October, 1819, is predominantly moral, as usual, but it has some discussion of poetry in general. This critic thinks that Crabbe is a poet who doesn't aspire to the epie but aims at sensations similar to those produced by Pope's satirical letters and his Dunciad.

Referring to Crabbe's statement in his preface that the first intention of a poet is to please, The Christian Observer says
If the test of pleasure conferred be the
general desire to purchase and to read,
then Mr. Crabbe wants nothing further to
prove that he is a pleasing poet; since we
know no poet more generally read, or made
more frequently the topic of interesting
and animated conversation.\textsuperscript{61}

But, unfortunately, these conversations show that his readers
don't enjoy his poetry but literally writhe under its horrors.
(We suspect that the Observer is speaking of religious circles.)
Although Crabbe observes poetic justice by making his punish¬
ments as disgusting as his crimes, he fails to instruct as he
should—he soorns rather than pities mankind for its vices and
misfortunes. "Aristotle ... makes it the office of tragedy to
purify the mind by pity and terror" but Crabbe's characters
don't rise to heroic action or even sink to honourable mis¬
fortune.\textsuperscript{62} The Observer objects not only to Crabbe's treatment
of religion and the Bible, but also to his increasing fondness
for love stories.

This magazine holds Southey up as an example of a poet who
is deservedly crowned with laurel and Byron as one

from whom that wreath should be withheld; ONE
from whom at least posterity shall snatch it
with indignation... whose writings display the
resources of the finest genius in dark and un¬
natural connexion with the worst qualities of
a perverted heart...\textsuperscript{63}

It regards the British public as "held in the silken chains of
a poetical enchantment" and Byron as "the victim at once of
passion and popularity..."\textsuperscript{64} And, as I have pointed out, this
moral attitude is not limited to religious magazines.
The critic of *The Monthly Review* complains bitterly of the "strange revolution...in the poetical taste of England." Whereas, a poet formerly had to have a dignified subject, "picturesque...circumstances," and poetic diction, all he needs now is exciting action or a wicked main character, with occasional pleasing poetic expression.

...poetry has been called down from that exalted region in which it was the delight of a few cultivated minds, and is now lowered to the pitch of the meanest intellect, and made the food of the vulgar. 65

This writer feels that Crabbe's prosaic verse, which is a sort of caricature of the classical school, has been encouraged by the relaxation of poetic taste. The prosaic connecting links of the present stories are worse than the "Gothic mixture of prose and verse" that Moore used in "Lalla Rookh."

Yet, with all this verbose garrulity of metrical conversation, this every-day talking in rhyme, the frequently displays a vigour and correctness of description, a deep observation on the human heart...which place him at the head of the moral painters of the age. 66

In his humour and in his style, particularly in his "mixture of sham prose with real verse," Crabbe reminds the *Monthly* of the author of Hudibras. The present age could use another Hudibras to attack prevailing weaknesses, such as Methodism, and this magazine feels that Crabbe is the logical candidate. 67

Of all the present tales "Smugglers and Poachers," which has much of the power of "The Hall of Justice," is this critic's favorite. Its main fault lies in its characters,
"rascalions" whom Crabbe dignifies with lofty passions.

This critic complains of Crabbe's fondness of the "vulgar violent and the vulgar pathetic," the introduction of "a sort of High Life below Stairs into the best efforts of the imagination." 68

Yet of Crabbe's best description, the Monthly says:

Yield, German Robbers; Scotch Marauders, yield;
And thou, great Corsair, quit the plunder'd field.

We will match Mr. Crabbe's 'Smugglers and Poachers' against them all; nay, we will throw "Peter Bell," the pedlar of Mr. Wordsworth, even in his best and most sniveling moments, into the opposite scale, and yet maintain our opinion. 69

Hazlitt, in 1818, included Crabbe in a series of lectures on the English poets, reviewed in Blackwood's, 70 and in 1821 published in the London Magazine an article on Crabbe which was reproduced with "numerous variations" in The Spirit of the Age (1825). This article is definitely unfavorable to Crabbe. Hazlitt admits that Crabbe is "one of the most popular and admired of our living authors" but he can explain it only by the fact that we are bound to the world around us with strong ties and we enjoy the exact truth and fidelity of Crabbe's representations of this world.

There are here no ornaments, no flights of fancy, no illusions of sentiment, no tinsel of words ... Litoral fidelity serves him in the place of invention;... He takes the most trite, the most gross and obvious and revolting part of nature, for the subject of his elaborate descriptions; but it is Nature still, and Nature is a great and mighty Goddess! 71
Hazlitt feels that the taste for imitative poetry is largely the result of public interest in painting. A critic used to the imitative art of "Teniers or Hobbima" (sic) would enjoy detailed word pictures.

As Mr. Crabbe is not a painter, only because he does not use a brush and colours, so he is for the most part a poet, only because he writes in lines of ten syllables. All the rest might be found in a newspaper, an old magazine, or a county-register.

Hazlitt says that Crabbe's attempt to justify his literal descriptions by citing Pope is a failure. Pope uses the "poetical point of view" and appeals to the imagination.

"Pope describes what is striking, Crabbe would have described merely what was there." While the tragic poet achieves a moral effect in his depiction of suffering, Crabbe merely gives us discoloured paintings of life; helpless, repining, unprofitable, unedifying distress. He is not a philosopher, but a sophist, a misanthrope in verse; a namby-pamby Mandeville, a Malthus turned metrical romancer.

Still Hazlitt admits that Crabbe's poems have certain excellencies:

...they are highly finished, striking, and original portraits, worked out with an eye to nature, and an intimate knowledge of the small and intricate folds of the human heart.

It is interesting to note that while the other critics of the age were praising Crabbe—sometimes, it is true, with a large admixture of fault finding—Hazlitt and Coleridge, the acknowledged two great critics of the age, from the first
judged Crabbe on a more universal poetic standard. Coleridge said "'In Crabbe there is an absolute defect of the high imagination; he gives me little or no pleasure; yet, no doubt, he has much power of a certain kind.'"76

Wilson in his preface to a review of the Chronicles of the Canongate in Blackwood's for November, 1827, continues his 1819 discussion of the poets of the poor, this time adding Scott's name to those of Crabbe, Burns, and Wordsworth. Whereas politics played a large part in the consideration of many of the poets, this review, for the first time, brings politics into a criticism of Crabbe. As a Tory critic, Wilson feels that Tory men of genius generally have the warmest sympathy for the lower classes and are best able to treat of such subjects. Wordsworth and Scott are Tories, Burns, although Whiggish, displayed Tory characteristics in the "Cotter's Saturday Night" and his best lyrics, but Crabbe is a Whig.77

Wordsworth's descriptions of common life may be ideal but the elements are in nature. He opens up secrets of his own spirit and makes us realize our own capacities. Burns, too, although he writes of common life as the life he himself lived, adds touches not found in nature. Crabbe, on the other hand, writes of common life as a satirical observer; he disheartens his reader by describing a life which, though he has considered shrewdly, he does not really know.
...Instead of the deep-thrilling, and often occult and mysterious Causation which indeed reigns over life, and of which great poets and writers of romance have in their representations caught shadowy and fearful reflections, he binds his events together by threads lying on life's surface.78

Wilson speaks of the criticism of the early part of the century, Jeffrey's in the *Edinburgh*, particularly. He says that criticism of Crabbe and Byron were vain attempts to prove the opposition of their principles and practice in poetry, to the Bards of the Lake-school, from whom, nevertheless, both Parson and Peer avowedly drew much of their best inspiration, and but for whom the finest things in the *Borough* and *Tales of the Hall*—in *Manfred* and *Childe Harold*—had never been.79

Wilson boasts that the present age, largely, of course, through Blackwood's influence, is the "Age of Intellect." Any genius who does anything like justice to himself need no longer fear criticism and he cannot remain in obscurity. Scott, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey are all recognized as property holders of Farnassus.80 But where, Mr. Wilson, may we ask, are Keats and Shelley?
THE POSTHUMOUS TALES
In 1834, two years after Crabbe's death, the publication of his life and collected works, including the Posthumous Tales, brought forth another series of reviews.

The political, social, and religious fears so rampant in 1819 had quieted down in the '20's and political and social differences had been settled to a large degree by the Reform Bill of 1832. That the age still emphasized the moral is evident, however, in such a review as that of Miss Edgeworth's Helen. This story was based on Charles Lamb's drama The Wife's Trial,* which, in turn had been adapted from Crabbe's The Confidant (1812--Tales in Verse). Where Crabbe's heroine had actually sinned in her youth and had cause to tremble at the threat of exposure to her husband, by her "confidant," Miss Edgeworth's heroine was guilty merely of having written some indiscreet letters in her youth, letters which were likely to arouse her husband's jealousy. As The Quarterly review remarked, "the bastard of the plain spoken poet is replaced in the novel by a mis-affiliated billet-doux. This is quite as it should be;..." We disagree by preferring Crabbe's realism to Miss Edgeworth's artificial story.

Criticism in the 1830's is calmer and often based on more universal standards than the earlier criticism. Coleridge is

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*Published in Blackwood's in December, 1828, Lamb's heroine, like Miss Edgeworth's, was innocent of sin. Her guilty secret was an unconsummated marriage to a young man long since dead.
the shining example of the good critic. The Athenæum, in 1830, replying to the Westminster's review of Coleridge's Works, says that the Westminster critic apparently had not read Coleridge or he would know that "'Biographia Literaria' contains the most elaborate and satisfactory analysis of poetry in the language..."2 The Quarterly, in 1835, in a discussion of Table-Talk quotes some of Coleridge's criticism of Shakespeare to prove that "it requires a poet to criticise poetry."3

The period between the reviews of Tales of the Hall and The Posthumous Poems had increased the emphasis on prose. The Quarterly in 1828 noted

> We have been rather in an odd state for some years, we think, both as to Poets and Poetry. Since the death of Lord Byron, there has been no king in Israel; and none of his former competitors now seem inclined to push their pretensions to the vacant throne. Scott, and Moore, and Southey, appear to have nearly renounced verse, and finally taken service with the Muses of prose;--Crabbe, and Coleridge, and Wordsworth, we fear, are burnt out;--and Campbell and Rogers repose under their laurels and, contented each with his own elegant little domain, seem but little disposed either to extend its boundaries, or to add new provinces to their rule.4

Keats and Shelley had been extinguished prematurely; and while there was still some good poetry appearing, there were "no miracles of the art--nothing visibly destined to inherit immortality."5

In 1831, The Quarterly announced that the spirit of the age was not favorable to poetry. In spite of the fact that all the great writers
Scott, Moore, Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Campbell, Crabbe, Milman, Rogers, Bowles, and others ... are still living among us, and in the full enjoyment of their poetical powers. ... they write no poetry; and, what is perhaps stranger—we do not expect it.

Poetry has become a luxury; prose the everyday staple. 6

Christopher North (John Wilson) in an article in Blackwood's (1831), "An Hour's Talk about Poetry," discusses the poets of the first quarter of the century and admits that none of them, not even his beloved Wordsworth, has written a great poem.

Of the poetry of Crabbe, he says

We hear it is not very popular. If so, then neither is human life. For of all our poets, he has most skilfully woven the web and woven the woof of all his compositions with the materials of human life—homespun indeed; but though often coarse, always strong—and though set to plain patterns, yet not unfrequently exceeding fine is the old weaver's workmanship. Ay—hold up the product of his loom between your eye and the light, and it glows and glimmers like the peacock's back or the breast of the rainbow. Sometimes it seems to be but of the "hodden grey;" when sunbeam or shadow smites it, and lo! it is burnished like the regal purple. 7

But he didn't write a great poem.

The critics of 1834, in discussing Crabbe's past and future popularity, agreed with Wilson. The majority of them felt that the publication of The Posthumous Tales would have little effect on Crabbe's already fading reputation. While these tales were generally more amusing than those of his previous volumes, none of them were as good as some of his earlier tales. Also, the critics felt that the republication of Crabbe's previous works was a doubtful venture, which would probably attract few buyers.
Readers of poetry looked for something higher than accurate accounts of the realities of life.

Lockhart in *The Quarterly* for January, 1834, expresses doubt as to the success of the new edition, particularly among the poor, who don't read Crabbe although they should be best able to appreciate him.

Placed by Byron, Scott, Fox, and Canning, and, we believe, by every one of his eminent contemporaries, in the very highest rank of excellence, Crabbe has never yet become familiar to hundreds of thousands of English readers well qualified to appreciate and enjoy his merits. 'The poet of the poor,' as his son justly styles him, has hitherto found little favor except with the rich; ... He only needs an introduction into the cottage, to supplant there for ever the affected sentimentality and gross sensualism of authors immeasurably below him in vigour and capacity of mind, as well as in dignity of heart and character, who have, from accidental circumstances, outrun him for a season in the race of popularity.

In November, 1834, Lockhart reviewed *The Posthumous Tales*. He felt that these tales would have no effect on Crabbe's reputation for, although generally more amusing than his previous tales, none of them compared with his highest former efforts. Yet he says that many of the "pithy couplets, ... will be... remembered while the English language lasts;" and many of the tales display Crabbe's skill in character analysis and his mastery of versification. Lockhart thinks that Byron's "Corsair," and "Lara" have influenced Crabbe until "in place of 'a Pope in worsted stockings' ... we seem now and then to be more reminded of a Dryden in a one-horse chaise."
The North American Review* in July, 1834, published a re-
view of Crabbe's life and poetry which was reprinted, word for
word, except for the omission of a passage on the North American
Indian, in the September number of The Monthly Review.

Unlike the majority of critics, this reviewer thinks that
Crabbe would have been a good novelist, mainly through his
power of description and character analysis.11

This reviewer discusses the poetical fitness of subjects
of humble life whose motives, passions, and feelings Crabbe has
treated of with such telling effect. The poet of the poor
can't "expect a willing audience:" we are more interested in
the great, as the writers of romance are well aware when they
give us heroes of rank and title. Yet the moral interest
should gain a wider following as the world grows wiser; and
Crabbe's purpose is moral. He doesn't aspire to the wide
vision and observation of Shakespeare but "what he undertakes
to describe, neither Scott nor Shakespeare could have painted
better." Whereas his early writings show only the dark side
of life, his later writings show more charity for human failings
and although sarcastic are thoughtful and philosophical.12

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*The North American Review, established in 1815, one of the
better American periodicals, evidently aspired to be an American
Edinburgh or Quarterly. Its articles have a magisterial tone,
but its reviewers write with independence.
Although this critic doesn't say so, this is probably due to Crabbe's later material circumstances.

The British Critic in July, 1834, has little to add to previous criticism. It echoes Wilson's comparison of Wordsworth and Crabbe—a comparison which of course is favorable to Wordsworth. The peasantry of Wordsworth are men...into whose spirits the music of nature has penetrated; men, who, from their childhood, have been familiar with the charms of the creation; to whose feet every woody defile, every pastoral glen...is familiar;...nature is the nurse who leads them up to God.13

Wordsworth's peasant, unlike that of Crabbe, is ennobled by the feeling of poetry.

This critic says that there are various degrees and kinds of excellence in poetry and where...true inspiration—is present, we ought to speak of the author only in terms of relative superiority or inferiority. He...had...little...of that genius which Shakespeare describes14 in a Midsummer Night's Dream. His excellencies and failings are those of a Dutch artist...vigour, coarseness, and minuteness of detail. Crabbe's prosaic language is well suited to his subject; we notice the lack of poetic diction only in some of his lyrics. Poetic diction, says this critic, is language with a hue taken from the imagination, and differs somewhat from the every-day dialect of common life. But many of Crabbe's poems, if deprived of their metrical form, would not only cease to retain any indication of a poetical origin, but would really become very idiomatic prose.15
Mrs. Hemans's "And I too in Arcadia dwelt" furnishes The British Critic with examples of good poetic diction. Yet even Mrs. Hemans makes mistakes. This critic objects to certain of her phrases—"heathery swells" because there is "no such word as swells in the language, except as a verb," and to "a stillness grey" because "silence ... having no substance cannot be invested with colour." In this connection he is not even sure that Milton's "raven wing of darkness" is admissible. 16

The Gentleman's Magazine in December, 1834, devotes its review to a discussion of Crabbe's popularity and the various elements that have advanced and retarded it. This magazine feels that Crabbe has

won his way progressively to the possession of a reputation which few of his contemporaries have surpassed, and which no change or caprice of public taste can lower or impair. 17

While Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth, having outrun or diverged from their age, were being treated with contempt, Crabbe came on the scene with his familiar domestic subjects. During his career he came into competition with Scott's tales of chivalry, Byron's melancholy characters, Keats's pagan mythology, and Shelley's splendid versification and imagery (wasted on "revolting" subjects). For a time Crabbe's subject and style, says this reviewer, retarded his popularity, but he interested "those who could not reach the high abstractions and fine imagination of Mr. Campbell's poetry" or "the exquisite...finish of Mr. Roger's 'cameos;' ..." 18

The same qualities which were unfavorable to Crabbe's first reception are still liable to affect his popularity—his
"repulsive realities" of low life—the passions, crimes, and sensuality which he depicts. He has not been universally recognized because the truthful pictures of the depravity of the poor are disagreeable to polished society. In his late volumes, however, he deals more with the middle classes.\(^1\)

In his true representations, in his character delineation, and in the "wisdom of his sentiments," he has at his command what Wordsworth calls "the great and simple affections, the elementary feelings, and essential passions."

In his style, Crabbe

Sometimes... approaches the easy and negligent graces of Goldsmith, sometimes affects the smart conciseness and pregnant brevity of Pope, and sometimes the... ruggedness of Cowper. ...very seldom does Mr. Crabbe delight us with specimens of that fine musical rhythm, those enchanting cadences, that flowing melody, those graceful idioms, and those exquisite touches of finished elegance, which we meet with in our best poets, from Dryden to Rogers.\(^2\)

The Edinburgh Review in January, 1835, questions Crabbe's poetic qualities and his popularity. Few instinctive poets would have maintained a twenty years' silence after "The Village." When Crabbe finally broke his silence, it was only to secure money with which to educate his sons. His personal qualities, as related by his son, are totally unlike those with which a poet is ordinarily endowed—insensibility to beauty of order; want of taste; indifference to painting, music, architecture, or landscape beauties; a passion for science—"of the human mind,...of nature in general,...and of
abstract qualities." He preferred watching the faces of the passers-by to contemplating the most beautiful natural scene; and yet "...his business with man seemed to be more to observe than to love him;..." He wrote so many lines a day—more as occupation than from an inner poetic desire. 21

This reviewer doubts that Crabbe will be considered the most popular poet of the age but says that he might have been if critical and professional acceptance counted. He had the avowed patronage of all who...were most likely and best entitled to lead the judgment of their times. Burke, Johnson, Thurlow and Fox helped him. The poets proclaimed their admiration—"the voices of the susceptible and the romantic minstrels...heard above the rest,"—Scott, Byron, Wordsworth, Wilson, Moore, Campbell, and Rogers. Croker thinks that "no poet of our time will stand higher with posterity" than Crabbe, but the present critic, unlike his predecessor Jeffrey, disagrees and points out that "posterity may be long in coming." 22

That there are few purchasers and therefore few readers is proved by the fact that Murray's purchase of the copyright for £5,000 was two-thirds above market value; and there are no signs that Crabbe's readers are increasing. He is considered unnatural in America and he is not popular at home—he is too

*It is interesting to note that most of Crabbe's best nature descriptions reflect the psychological condition of the minds of his characters. (See "Peter Grimes," "Delay has Dangers," "The Lover's Journey," etc.)
painful and true. Posterity will object to the same things his readers have always objected to—the representation of physical and moral pain without ennobling elements. We may admire the clear and microscopic observation of ordinary existence given with the marvelous exactness of Miss Austen's novels and treating of subjects which she never ventured on. A few readers may enjoy realities of life in their strongest flavors but the majority of readers expect a certain gratification from poetry which he does not give. Poetry must appeal to a higher nature than the average conditions of ordinary life. "The sense of this necessity has been, of olden time, the secret of the sublime and beautiful."

Crabbe once said* that he had no poetic theory but merely painted man truthfully. Yet he contends that he fulfills the prime purpose of poetry, that of carrying us away from our everyday concerns, by depicting painful realities that are not the concerns and distresses of the reader. This sounds like a poetic theory to the Edinburgh critic.

It introduces us to subjects and to a spirit so new in poetry, that, independent of all the quaint and vigorous peculiarities of his style, its author necessarily became the most original writer of his age. Other writers had taken far darker views of human nature and human life, and had at the same time kept comparatively clear of the objections taken against Crabbe... He has none of the gloom of Young, the pensiveness of Goldsmith, the Calvinism of Cowper, or the misanthropy of Byron. The difference is, that, by adopting a higher tone, they became, whenever they succeeded, touching or sublime... He seldom speaks the higher truths belonging to the more aspiring part of our nature.  

*In his 1812 Preface.
The Westminster Review* in its article of July, 1835, attacks Crabbe on his attitude toward society. He has shirked the poet's great moral responsibility, of "qualifying himself thoroughly as an instructor on points which deeply concern the welfare of society." Shelley would have received favorable notice from this critic, who feels that

...the period is nearly gone by, during which either poets or critics have been considered as dealers in words. The great concern of social man, his progress as a rational and moral being, must now be the final end of every work of literature and art. This object must be more or less prominent, according to the nature and circumstances of each particular work; but no performance whatever will obtain a permanent hold on the public mind, unless it can contribute to the great object in question.

The Westminster feels that Crabbe must have read Mandeville frequently and cites as evidence a number of sketches from Mandeville which are very similar to some of Crabbe's. But, says the reviewer, where Mandeville, considering the evils of society, consoles himself by regarding evil as the basis of prosperity, Crabbe achieves no philosophy but merely dwells on evil "with intellectual apathy."

This reviewer contends that Crabbe's poetic theory was apparently based on the theological concept that you can save man

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*The Westminster Review, established in 1824, was the official organ of the utilitarian radicals under the leadership of James and John Stuart Mill. This radical group took its inspiration from Jeremy Bentham who believed that law and social organization should be devoted to securing "the greatest possible amount of happiness and the smallest amount of pain" for all people. The Westminster became known as the third great review but, of course, criticism of poetry and fiction was not as important as its discussions of philosophical radicalism.

George L. Nesbitt, Benthamite Reviewing, 22.
only by convincing him of his degradation. Crabbe's poetry is addressed to the upper classes, who enjoy the gratification of their curiosity about the humble classes without actually experiencing their pain, not to the poor, who would have been insulted by his pictures. Crabbe erred in that he did not arouse the upper classes to a charitable interest in the sufferings of the poor. This reviewer feels, in common with several of his fellow critics, that Crabbe's early experiences had embittered him to the point where he himself had lost sympathy with those of the class to which he was born.\(^{29}\)

The *Westminster* critic considers Crabbe's 1812 Preface "a very erroneous essay on poetry." According to this critic:

Poetry and prose are only different applications of language, in conformity with two different ends. Language employed principally for some necessary or useful purpose, and incidentally for gratification, is prose; reverse the two conditions and it is poetry.\(^{30}\)

The fact that the readers allow an author greater license when he uses rhyme explains why Crabbe would never have been a good novelist; his minute descriptions of ordinary and sometimes repulsive objects would never have been tolerated in prose. His "delicate ear for measure; ...and the ingenious adaptation of the thought to the space" of the couplet make us forgive his annoying minuteness.\(^{31}\)

\(^{*}\)This critic compares the four lines Dr. Johnson altered in "The Village" to Crabbe's original lines and points out that Crabbe's lines were much better.
Crabbe erred in thinking that correct copies of even vulgar and disgusting objects would produce pleasure. Yet he is a poet

—one placed by Nature in a privileged and most distinguished rank. Crabbe is the poet of sympathy; the secrets of the heart were revealed to him in a degree not much inferior to the revelation which Nature made to Shakespeare. Look at his pictures of character, and you forget the provoking perverseness of his systematic bad taste. He well knew where his strength lay, but... indulged the rustic and vulgar pride of placing himself at his ease...

To his unfortunate propensity for the broad laugh, and the knowing smile, we may certainly attribute all his poetical errors; for he could rise to something like the simple and mild sublimity of Homer, when, abjuring his taste for frolic and coarse satire, he looked on man with a solemn and reverential feeling.
In addition to the preceding reviews devoted entirely to Crabbe's publications, there are numerous casual references to Crabbe throughout the periodical criticism of the time. He is mentioned in practically all of the reviews of such works as Allan Cunningham's *British Poetry at the End of the Last Century*¹ and Hazlitt's *English Poets*.² He is referred to in almost all of the discussions of realistic fiction, particularly that dealing with the poor. The *Quarterly*, in 1813, in its review of Scott's anonymously published *Bridal of Triorain, or the Vale of St. John*, thinks that the character of the Poacher has all of those qualities of poverty, misery, and profligacy which Crabbe portrays with unexampled felicity; and in the delineation of it, the author has given us specimens of almost all the merits and defects of the master whom he copies.³

The description of the squalid lodging of one of Buonoparte's ruffians in Paris in 1815, a *Poem*,⁴ also reminds the *Quarterly* of Mr. Crabbe. Mary Russell Mitford's *Sketches of Rural Character and Scenery*⁵ are inevitably compared to Crabbe's delineations, as are Ebenezer Elliott's *Corn-Law Rhymes*,⁶ which, of course, were directly inspired by Crabbe's poetry, and Miss Edgeworth's moral tales. Jeffrey, in his review of Byron's *Giaour* compares it to the best of Crabbe's lyrical tales, which he says does more to recommend this little volume to all true lovers of poetry than if we had employed a larger space than it occupies with a critique and analysis of the contents.⁷

Such instances of the wide recognition of Crabbe's work could be multiplied indefinitely.
There are an astonishing number of reviews on Crabbe after 1835, both in England and America. Some of these reviews are the result of new editions of Crabbe's works or life, one or two are probably the result of the Crabbe celebration at Aldborough in 1904, and others seem to be independent findings. The authors of most of these reviews, whatever the original cause of their interest, seem to be discovering Crabbe for the first time, and the majority of them express surprise that English critics have allowed such a writer to fall into neglect. These reviews, of which there are a number even in the last ten or fifteen years, are interesting reading but, as I pointed out in my introduction, they give us little new material. In fact, to one who has read the early reviews, most of the comments have a familiar ring; also, the passages which these later reviews quote are for the most part the same passages quoted in the earlier reviews. Outside of the tendency to make a modern out of Crabbe by comparing him with George Eliot, Hardy, and the French naturalistic school, the modern reviews agree, in the main, with the early criticism. Crabbe's strength in character delineation, his talent for observation, his minute accuracy of description, and his great satirical power are all mentioned just as they were in the early reviews. His choice of subject matter and his versification also come in for their share of discussion. Naturally the question of disgusting subject matter is not of such vital consequence to reviewers familiar with the naturalistic school, but there is
still a difference of opinion on the merit of his verse. Just as the opinion of the early reviewers varied from that in which Crabbe's poetry was characterized as "scrannel scraping" to the Westminster's belief that no one would deny that Crabbe had a delicate ear for versification, so do the modern reviewers disagree. A number of them regard his poetry as prosaic, powerful fiction, poetical novel writing rather than poetry. (And this, of course, brings up the question of whether or not he could have written good novels—on which again there is a difference of opinion.) The Quarterly Review of 1901 goes so far as to defend as deliberate bathos Crabbe's famous Clutterbuck and Co. couplet, which has been used time and again as an example of his worst style.

And I was asked and authorised to go
To seek the firm of Clutterbuck and Co.—
I am not sure that I would go this far but I do agree with Samuel Locker in his article in the Nineteenth Century (1931) that the metre of a loved poet will be music to the ears of his admirer. Elton contends that Crabbe is "the last great writer of the couplet in its 'classical' form." Although his couplets sometimes remind us of Pope, they more often have the "nobler sweep of Dryden." He "forged a rhythm that accords with natural domestic talk."

He stretched and adjusted the familiar couplet with singular address to his chosen purpose, nor has it ever again been used so well for that purpose... The narratives in blank verse of the Excursion are more liable to be dull than Crabbe's heroics, to which dialogue and monologue are much better fitted.
The poetry-painting parallel of the early reviews is of little concern to the modern reviewer, altho the majority of them compare him to Hogarth, but the question of Crabbe's right to the rank of poet is still a live question. The consensus of opinion is that he is not a poet in the highest sense of the word; he doesn't thrill the heart as do Scott, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson but he is a poet, nevertheless. As Elton says, his style beside that of Byron or Coleridge is instructive. "Both orders of style are good, and art and thought are incomplete without them both...."

In the early reviews, Crabbe was compared to poets ranging from Pope to Shakespeare and Homer. The modern critic compares him most often with Chaucer, of the great poets, but surprisingly enough he continues to be compared with Shakespeare up into the twentieth century. James T. Hillhouse, in his study of the Waverley Novels cites the critics' comparison of Scott with Shakespeare as proof of the esteem in which Scott was held. Of course, as Hillhouse admitted, any poet, or writer, could be compared with Shakespeare and frequently many inferior ones were, but not so constantly. It is interesting to note the critics's treatment of Crabbe in this respect.

The later reviews are, on the whole, more eulogistic than the early ones, naturally, for a man who deliberately chooses to review an almost forgotten poet is usually prejudiced in his favor. Yet I find, in agreement with Hillhouse's
conclusions in his Scott study, that Crabbe's contemporaries in great part judged well. They were as good, if not better, critics of Crabbe as the modern reviewers. They exhibited certain prejudices, of course, such as Blackwood's Tory attitude, The Westminster's social bias, and the religious fears of The Christian Observer; but these were prejudices of the individual magazines, not the political, social, and religious opinions held by the majority, and certainly they can't compare with the rabid prejudices that affected Shelley, Keats, Hunt, and Byron to such a great extent after 1814. On the whole, I believe that this early criticism of Crabbe gives us a good idea of the intrinsic worth of his poetry, and as unbiased a picture of the critical trends as it would be possible to secure from any literary criticism of this period.
FOOTNOTES

Introduction

1 Oliver Elton, *A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1880*, I, 44.


3 Ibid., 28-9.


5 Elton, *op. cit.*, I, 45-46.


8 Alden, *op. cit.*, xvii.

The Parish Register

1 Crabbe's *Life and Poems*, edited by his son, I, 185.

2 Rene Huchon, *George Crabbe and his Times, 1754-1832*, 248.


6 Ibid., xxxii-iii.

7 Ibid., xxxviii.


9 *Edinburgh Review*, I (October, 1802), "Advertisement."

10 White, *op. cit.*, 5.

11 *Edinburgh Review*, XII, 132 (April, 1808), "Crabbe's Poems."
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 133.
14 Ibid., I, 63 (October, 1802), "Southey's Thalaba."
15 Ibid., 63-4.
16 Ibid., 66.
17 Ibid., VII, 2 (October, 1805), "Southey's Madoc."
18 Ibid., XI, 214-31 (October, 1907), "Poems by W. Wordsworth."
19 Ibid., XII, 133.
20 Ibid., 134-5.
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22 Ibid., 135.
23 Ibid., 136.
24 Ibid., XI, 215.
25 Ibid., XII, 137-8.
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27 Ainger, op. cit., 54.
28 Edinburgh Review, XII, 139.
29 Huohon, op. cit., 169.
30 Edinburgh Review, XII, 141-2.
31 Ibid.
32 George Saintsbury, A History of Nineteenth Century Literature, 176.
33 Edinburgh Review, XII, 141.
34 Ibid., 144-7.
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50 Gentleman's Magazine, LXXII (vol. 2) 1033-1038 (November, 1807), "Crabbe's Poems."
51 Elton, op. cit., I, 387.

The Borough

1 Pierce, op. cit., 121.
2 Edinburgh Review, XVI, 263 (August, 1810), "Scott's Lady of the Lake."
3 Ibid., 269.
4 Ibid., XI, 227 (October, 1807), "Poems by W. Wordsworth."
5 Pierce, op. cit., 118.
6 Byron's Letters and Journals, III, 125; IV, 488; etc.
7 Pierce, op. cit., 121.
8 Huchon, op. cit., 304.
9 Edinburgh Review, XVI, 32 (April, 1810), "Crabbe's Borough."

10 Crabbe's Life and Poems, III, 15, footnote.

11 Edinburgh Review, I, 65-6 (October, 1802), "Southey's Thalaba."

12 Ibid., XVI, 32-3.

13 Ibid., 34.

14 Ibid., 40-2.

15 Ibid., 35-6.

16 Ibid., 37-9.

17 Ibid., 47.

18 Ibid., 45-6.

19 Ibid., 47-3.

20 Ibid., 53.

21 Ibid., 53-5.

22 Ibid., XVI, 284.

23 Ibid., 266.

24 Ibid., VII, 3 (October, 1807) "Southey's Madoo."

25 Monthly Review, LXI, 396-7 (April, 1810), "Crabbe's Borough."

26 Ibid., 404.

27 Ibid., 409.

28 Ibid., 396.

29 Ibid., 408.

30 Monthly Mirror, VIII, 126-8 (August, 1810), "Crabbe's Borough."

31 Ibid., 132.

32 Ibid., 282-3 (October, 1810), "Crabbe's Borough."

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7 Byron's Letters and Journals, IV, 169.

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11 Blackwood's, I, 269 (June, 1817), "Manfred."
12 Ibid., XI, 212 (February, 1822), "Lord Byron."
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