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George Crabbe and the Place of Amusement

Abstract

The question of George Crabbe's position in relation to two generations of poets (the Augustans and the Romantics) has intrigued readers and critics ever since Hazlitt pronounced him an enemy to the imagination. Crabbe himself attempted to explain his literary genealogy in the preface to *Tales* (1812). This essay argues, however, that his late poem, 'Silford Hall; or, The Happy Day' (composed c. 1822–1824), offers a more nuanced and heartfelt answer. Silford Hall was modelled on Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire (the home of Crabbe's patrons, the dukes of Rutland), a place that the poet visited repeatedly—in imagination and in reality—for over five decades. Taking account of a draft ending that was detached from the main body of the poem printed in John Murray's *Posthumous Tales* (1834), I trace allusions to Johnson's *Rasselas* as a means of unpicking Crabbe's emphasis on dwelling and retrospection. Consequently, I re-frame 'Silford Hall' as a mode of place-writing that telescopes the perspectives of youth and age. As such, the tale constitutes a critique of Romantic vision even as it shows the significance of such vision within Crabbe's development as a poet.

*

'Reading for amusement only', George Crabbe wrote to his granddaughter in 1830, 'is not the satisfaction of a reasonable being'.[1] The generational divide across which Crabbe offered the advice was one of literary taste as well as maturity. Amusement entails distraction or diversion from every-day cares, the excitement of pleasure, and (etymologically) musing or reverie—qualities not commonly associated with Crabbe's verse. Henry Crabb Robinson, for instance, noted that Crabbe 'had an eye only for the sad realities of life' while William

Hazlitt famously complained that Crabbe piles upon his readers 'helpless, repining, unprofitable, unedifying distress'; Coleridge asserted that 'in Crabbe there is an absolute defect of the high imagination; he gives me little or no pleasure'.[2] As a child of the eighteenth century, Crabbe was 'a reasonable being'. He had been a friend of Burke, Reynolds, and Johnson, he aligned himself with Pope and Dryden, and was (in F. R. Leavis's words) 'positively in sympathy with the Augustan tradition'.[3] He was also a keen botanist, geologist, and natural historian. His granddaughter, by contrast, became a reader in the afterwash of a literary movement that differently valued flights of imagination.[4] 'At your age, my dear Caroline', the letter to his granddaughter continues, 'I read every book which I could procure'. (He especially enjoyed 'little stories and ballads about ghosts, witches and fairies' cut from his father's copies of Martin's monthly *Magazine*.[5]) However, such reading habits were not, Crabbe believed, compatible with the painful realities of adulthood, whatever the literary fashion.

Crabbe's advice that his granddaughter ought not to seek 'amusement only' in her reading is connected with his larger poetic interest in over-imaginative youths. As early as *The Library* (1781) Crabbe identified reverie and the taste for romance as a childhood fascination to be grown out of: it is, he writes, 'the infant mind, to Care unknown, | That makes th' imagin'd Paradise its own' but soon enough 'Enchantment bows to Wisdom's serious Plan'.[6] Crabbe was still reflecting on this predilection of youth in his seventh decade. 'Silford Hall, or The Happy Day', the opening poem of *Posthumous Tales* (1834), evokes amusement after amusement as it narrates the glorious boyhood adventure of Peter Perkin. The poem focuses, with sympathy, on childhood feelings and intuitions and, as such, has been singled out amongst Crabbe's works for its 'interest in a mode of consciousness' and its 'distinctly turn-of-the-century flavour'.[7] Crabbe seems to deviate from his matter-of-fact narrative mode to make a foray into Romantic territory; he evokes an aristocratic setting in

the manner of Scott in which to explore the kind of insight that was privileged by Wordsworth and Coleridge in *Lyrical Ballads*. However, a tonally-different ending to 'Silford Hall' that Crabbe drafted whilst working on the poem sometime between 1822 and 1824 indicates the significance of this late experiment. In its criticism of Peter's outlook, the draft material alters the complexion of the main body of the tale (from which it was detached prior to publication) and transforms the work into a deeply personal retrospection on Crabbe's development as a poet.

The first section of this essay takes the published body of 'Silford Hall' on its own terms; it adopts the sympathetic view of Peter that Crabbe encourages whilst tracing allusions to Samuel Johnson's *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759). The second section turns to the draft conclusion showing how this material invites a closer, more critical reading of Peter's experience at Silford, and offering a full account of the autobiographical context on which the multi-layered presentation of that experience is founded. It has long been noted that Silford Hall was modelled on Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire where Crabbe served as domestic chaplain to the fourth and fifth Dukes of Rutland; by unpicking the allusions to *Rasselas*, I suggest that Crabbe's revisiting of Belvoir (and similar places that he associated with it) over several decades shaped his thinking about pleasure, amusement, and imaginative overindulgence. Consequently, 'Silford Hall' exemplifies a mode of place-writing that telescopes the felt experiences of youth and age. In this light, the third section of the essay argues that the whole of 'Silford Hall' warrants close attention because (with greater feeling and nuance than his prose prefaces) it catches Crabbe situating himself in relation to two generations of poets and, as such, constitutes a pointed response to those Romantic-period readers who derided his verse for lacking the power to amuse.

'The Happy Day'

‘Silford Hall’ is preoccupied with the activities of reading and writing, and with the pleasure derived from various amusements and art forms. Nathaniel Perkin is a village schoolmaster. He labours at teaching ‘Some forty boys, the sons of thrifty men’ (12) to read and write, and is often obliged to exaggerate their rudimentary abilities to placate the pride of enquiring parents.[8] His only son, Peter, who shares the burden of tutoring younger boys, endures a life of toil, responsibility and hunger, missing ‘the master’s dignity, and yet, | No portion of the school-boy’s play to get’ (61–2). Peter’s only ‘drop of comfort’ (71) comes from reading, and the tale begins with a description of the works that ‘rejoiced him at his heart’ (112). In devouring the unbound sheets of romances, ballads, and fairy tales collected by his mother—as well as his father’s bound copies of modern poetry, plays, and novels—Peter’s ‘cares and labours [were] all forgot’ (134). Guided by this reading, and in an attempt to avert his misery, Peter composes his own verse:

> His books, his walks, his musing, morn and eve,
> Gave such impressions as such minds receive;
> And with his moral and religious views
> Wove the wild fancies of an Infant-Muse,
> Inspiring thoughts that he could not express,
> Obscure sublime! his secret happiness.
> Oft would he strive for words, and oft begin
> To frame in verse the views he had within;
> But ever fail’d: for how can words explain
> The unform’d ideas of a teeming brain? (164–73)

Peter's poetry is as fanciful as his favourite reading material. The 'wild fancies of an Infant-Muse' (which throw Crabbe's steady iambic metre off balance) lead Peter to conjure sublime imagery; yet this 'happiness' remains 'secret' and the caesura suggests the abruptness with which he 'ever fail'd' to articulate these imaginings. As Peter's 'unform'd ideas' refuse to settle into even metrical feet in the final line quoted above, the narrator implies that a bridled muse equates to aesthetic maturity. Peter's mind is trapped in a closed circuit: having lived a constrained life, his mode of seeing is conditioned by habitual reading and reverie which, in turn, inflects the impressions he receives from books and nature. That is to say, Peter's imagination and taste curtail the expansion of his mind and his ability to "read" the real world.

Criticism of Peter's verse is dropped, however, as the narration of the main action of 'Silford Hall' is guided by the 'Infant-Muse', and Crabbe begins to mobilize tropes of Virgilian and Spenserian epic. Peter escapes a tedious cycle of work for 'The Happy Day' on which he embarks on a quest to the local manor. Sent by his father to pay a bill, Peter is 'the Hero of a Day' (175); dressed in his finest courtly clothes and set upon his steed, he prepares for an adventure akin to those he encountered in ballads and romances (195–219). With the simple errand soon complete, Peter's craving for excitement is answered when the 'learned' (279) housekeeper, 'Madam Johnson', offers a guided tour, introducing him to the paintings, sculpture, books, and various pastimes of her privileged master. Peter's fancy runs riot; his behaviour and responses to the objects and situations he encounters are inflected by his juvenile reading. The result is a tale that recounts a day of exploration and amusement channelled through Peter's consciousness and punctuated with moments of affectionately framed mock-heroism.[9]

Crabbe's subtitle and the presence of 'Madam Johnson' signal various other allusions to *Rasselas*, several of which invert elements of Dr Johnson's narrative.[10] While the young

Prince of Abissinia is trapped in a cycle of endless leisure and amusement in the Happy Valley, Peter—described by Crabbe as a 'prince' (38)—is bound to a life of toil. Both Crabbe's and Johnson's heroes reflect on their discontentment (Peter often feels 'a softening sadness' (160) without knowing why) and both are compelled to seek knowledge and diversion outside their hereditary realms. While Rasselas escapes the Happy Valley for a period of years under the guidance of Imlac, Peter enters the 'glorious dwelling of a princely race' (303) for a single 'Happy Day' with his own Johnsonian guide. From Peter's perspective, Silford is sealed off from the world by 'Lawn, wood, and water', deer park, and fields; like Johnson's Happy Valley it is a place of natural abundance as well as artifice where 'Fruits of all tastes in spacious gardens grew' alongside 'flowers of every scent and every hue' (181–4). Peter is 'feasted to his heart's content' (298) before Mrs Johnson takes him through 'rooms immense, and galleries wide and tall'. He is 'entranced' (301) and convinced that happiness permeates the lives of the Hall's inhabitants:

> Much had he seen, and every thing he saw
> Excited pleasure not unmix'd with awe.
> Leaving each room, he turn'd as if once more
> To enjoy the pleasure that he felt before—
> "What then must their possessors feel? how grand
> And happy they who can such joys command!
> For they may pleasures all their lives pursue,
> The winter pleasures, and the summer's too—
> Pleasures for every hour in every day—
> Oh! how their time must pass in joy away!" (510–19)

Looking back at each room as if happiness were an object lodging there, Peter adopts the opinion of those who visited the Happy Valley during the annual Abyssinian festival of pleasure: 'they to whom it was new always desired that it might be perpetual; and as those, on whom the iron gate had once closed, were never suffered to return, the effect of longer experience could not be known'.[11] Peter's awe culminates in a sighed string of monosyllables that yearn after the flight they describe. And yet, Crabbe's lines are worn down by a repetition of 'pleasure', and the rhyme between 'more' and 'before' (which perpetuates the 'awe'/'saw' couplet to create a surfeiting quartet) undermines the apparent promise of addition with the deflation of return thus preparing the reader for Mrs Johnson's response:

> "What you call pleasure scarcely owns the name.
> The very changes of amusement prove
> There's nothing that deserves a lasting love.
> They hunt, they course, they shoot, they fish, they game;
> The objects vary, though the end the same—
> A search for that which flies them; no, my Boy!
> 'Tis not enjoyment, 'tis pursuit of joy." (521–7)

In listing the endless round of aristocratic amusement with the metrical 'tramp, tramp, tramp' that Tennyson heard throughout Crabbe's tales, Mrs Johnson encapsulates the discontentment felt by Rasselas in the Happy Valley.[12] Rasselas is asked: 'if you want for nothing, how are you unhappy?' Although he has 'no power of perception which is not glutted with its proper pleasure', Rasselas does not 'feel [himself] delighted'.[13] Peter feels the reverse of the Abyssinian Prince: it is the novelty—not the luxury—that pleases him; he misreads perpetual

gratification for perpetual boredom. The difference between the two heroes is that Peter lacks the effect of 'longer experience'.

Like *Rasselas*, 'Silford Hall' ends with the traveller's return to his starting point and a reflection on what has passed:

> So deep the impression of that happy Day,
> Nor time nor cares could wear it all away;
> Ev'n to the last, in his declining years,
> He told of all his glories, all his fears.
> How blithely forward in that morn he went,
> How blest the hours in that fair palace spent,
> How vast that Mansion, sure for monarch plann'd,
> The rooms so many, and yet each so grand, —
> Millions of books in one large hall were found,
> And glorious pictures every room abound;
> Beside that strangest of the wonders there,
> That house itself contain'd a house of prayer. (714–25)

The subtle narrative shift between verse paragraphs indicates that Peter recalls, and subsequently retells, the events of the happy day ('all his glories, all his fears') in the manner of romance. Crabbe's narrator channels Peter's naivety, voicing the child's breeziness in setting out 'blithely', his innocent exaggeration in the estimation of 'Millions of books', and his inexperience in not recognizing a domestic chapel. By the end, neither Peter nor the narrator seem to have heeded Mrs Johnson's warning about the weariness behind the luxury: Peter returns home enchanted and retains the immature perspective throughout his life;

Crabbe's narrator makes no comment, leaving the reader with a sense of the intrinsic value of childhood perception.

Characters like Peter are usually punished in Crabbe's tales, and the Johnsonian presence in 'Silford Hall' underscores its uncharacteristic sympathy with the boy's outlook. In *The Village* (1784), for example, Crabbe rejects the poetic construction of Arcadian 'groves' and 'happy valleys'. In well-known lines that were modified by Dr Johnson prior to publication, Crabbe derides fanciful 'Bards' and asserts that works of imitation and of imagination betray truth and nature. Johnson's corrections to *The Village*—which revise that notion into a warning that modern poets stray when they imitate Virgil—temper Crabbe's realism, whereas in 'Silford Hall' Mrs Johnson pulls in the opposite direction as she checks Peter's overactive muse.[14] Since no real hardships or disappointments befall Peter on his 'Happy Day', and as the poem draws to its blithe conclusion without moral comment, it is incongruous with the style for which Crabbe was known and criticised.[15] This incongruity gains significance, however, in light of the draft ending.

Dwelling, Revisiting, and Slow Observation

The manuscript conclusion to 'Silford Hall'—which Norma Dalrymple-Champneys identifies as 'apparently rejected' by Crabbe—extends the narrative time of the published tale, moving far beyond the single 'Happy Day' and breaking the circularity of the plot.[16] Crabbe ousts the 'Infant-Muse' and introduces a severe didactic narrator who shatters the spell of enchantment under which Peter left Silford. The purpose is to teach Peter the lesson he failed to learn from Mrs Johnson and to explain how a craving for amusement and imaginative literature becomes glutted.[17] As such, the passage operates as an epilogue rather than a substitute conclusion. Critics have not paid serious attention to this material. Robert L. Chamberlain simply asserts that 'aesthetic judgment … led Crabbe to expunge well-composed but unnecessary passages',

while Peter New states that the 'obvious morals [of the passage] would clearly have spoilt the impact of the tale'.[18] The epilogue certainly does disrupt the harmonic resolution, but not without consequence: at one level it draws attention to issues and ambiguities in Peter's tale; at another level, it opens up a complex autobiographical context that indicates the significance of 'Silford Hall' within Crabbe's oeuvre as an piece of multi-perspective place-writing.

Crabbe seems to have separated the epilogue into two sections: the whole draft (amounting to 128 lines) was written into one notebook while a fair copy of the first ninety lines was entered in another notebook. The first segment sets the pace for unremitting realism and condescension: the narrator turns outwards to address a mature reader (whose presence is not implied in the main body of the tale) to explain the shortcomings of 'our Traveller' (1) and 'our Youth' (82). Peter is undermined further as Crabbe interweaves ironic passages of indirect narration, adopting the boy's exaggerated view of Silford's residents ('Who all day long are pleased, and feasted every day' (13)). In switching between tones and perspectives, Crabbe emphasizes the gulf of opinion between the narrator and the boy, a gap that is only subliminal in the central story. The fragment tilts away from the orbit of the 'Infant-Muse' most plainly when the narrator turns to address Peter:

> Dream on, dear Boy, let pass a few short Years,
> Replete with Troubles, Comforts, Hopes, and Fears,
> Bold Expectations, Efforts wild and strong,
> And thou shalt find thine Expectations wrong.
> Imagination rules thee, thine are Dreams;
> And Every Thing to thee is what it seems.
> Thou seest the Surfaces of Things that pass

Before thee, Coloured by thy Fancy's Glass,
What is within is hidden; What is true
In that fair Dwelling comes not in thy View.
And thou wouldst feel a new and strange Surprise
Should all within upon thy Mind arise
And all that passes there be opened to thine Eyes.
The View would harm thee, spoil thy dream of Youth,
And thou wouldst start to see the naked Truth. (22–37)

These lines make explicit what was implicit earlier: that Peter's reading habits and overactive imagination shaped his misguided impression of the 'Happy Day'. As Dr Johnson noted, a single experience is not enough to generate an accurate understanding of a given place: Peter would have had to dwell at Silford Hall—or at least revisit—over many years in order to appreciate what Rasselas felt in the Happy Valley. With bitter sarcasm, which jars with the intimacy of the second-person address, Peter is told to 'Dream on'; the lines fold back on themselves (as if registering the effort required to wake up), reasserting that 'thine are Dreams' and that opening his eyes would 'spoil thy dream of Youth'. The balance between 'Troubles, Comforts, Hopes, and Fears' is skewed by the syntax, which encloses the more positive terms within the middle of the line and magnifies the negative ones with the proximity of 'Replete' and the rhyme with 'Years'; pathos and futility are implied in rhyming 'strong' with 'wrong'. The narrator chastises the boy for seeing only the 'Surfaces of things' as they are reflected through 'Fancy's Glass'; that is to say, Peter does not look directly or closely but catches a reflection in the mirror of art. Paradoxically, Peter's imaginative mode of looking results in extreme literalness ('Every Thing to thee *is* what it seems') while the alexandrine indicates the solemnness he would feel if he did see that which is obscured ('And

all that passes there be opened to thine Eyes'). Crabbe frames this blindness as a characteristic of childhood. The distance between youth and maturity is mapped on to that between fancy and truth, between the surface gleam and the naked reality.

Through its presentation of Peter's adulation for the nobleman's life—and for the lives of the jolly servants—the main body of the tale celebrates feudalism and reveres Silford as a repository of art. In the first segment of the epilogue, however, the narrator gestures towards the moral difficulties and responsibilities that attend ownership of art, land, property, and people by comparing servitude with slavery.[19] While the stated purpose of the comparison is to emphasize the dignity of service and the freedoms of ordinary working folk—'The servant freely sells | His Time and Skill' (53–4) whereas 'Slaves cannot bargain, cannot ought withhold, | Themselves as well as Services are sold' (59–60)—the broader implication is that Peter's 'labour' at his father's school (where he went unacknowledged, unpaid, and unfed for his 'pains' (45–8)) now looks like exploitation. Moreover, in this light, moments of fear and confusion that seemed not to tarnish his enjoyment of the 'Happy Day' become more troubling. When exploring the gallery, for example, Peter was 'ashamed' to stand before a painting of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (395); he questioned the 'truth' of Flemish representations of 'nature', and was appalled at the cost of a Gerrit Dow painting (421; 441–50). Art, for young Peter, was *not* a matter of sheer amusement: where it jarred with his moral sensibility, it caused him pain. He was also sensitive to the irreverence of naming a chess-piece after a senior member of the clergy (493–4) and registered the cruelty involved in hunting and fishing for sport (505). Levels of attentiveness and guardianship at the hall are also called into question when one reconsiders the behaviour of Mrs Johnson: she was negligent in accidentally locking Peter in the library and she failed to see the impropriety that troubled him in the painting of the lewd biblical scene (404–15; 602–25). Peter, in fact, had something to teach her.

While it encourages the reader to revisit details they may have skimmed over, the epilogue implies that Peter's retelling of his 'Happy Day' obscures the complexities and ambiguities of the lived experience. Peter's romantic tale becomes simplified and less accurate as he repeats it again and again into 'his declining years'. Crabbe indicates the pitfalls of this habit through moments of reiteration. For example, the initial description of Peter's tour, given in the main body of the poem, begins thus:

> Now could he look on that delightful place,
> The glorious dwelling of a princely race. (302–3)

Peter's recollection in the immediate days after the visit, which is given towards the start of the epilogue, has the same ring:

> How blest, supremely blest, this favoured Race,
> The chosen People of the Matchless Place. (9–10)[20]

The iteration indicates the drift of Peter's post-hoc story-telling. Using the same conventional rhyme, both couplets focus on the fitness of the people for the setting; however, the latter, which captures a memory rather than an observation, offers a more abstract view of the 'blest' inhabitants and elides the reference to 'dwelling'—precisely the sense of temporality that Mrs Johnson warned Peter not to ignore. At the first remove, Peter exaggerates the happiness of the Hall's residents.

The habit of retelling the same narratives without going back to look at the real world, was an element of romance, gothic, and sentimental literature that Crabbe disliked. In the tale of Ellen Orford ('Letter XX' of *The Borough* (1810))—described by Gavin Edwards as a

'manifesto for the final and major stage of Crabbe's literary career'[21]—the narrator announces his dismay 'That Books, which promise much of Life to give, | Should show so little how we truly live' (15–16). Over time, Crabbe's narrator complains, repeated use of stock characters and generic tropes wears away all substance: 'Creatures borrow'd and again convey'd | From Book to Book' become 'the Shadows of a Shade' (19–20). Ellen Orford's tale (which stands out amongst Crabbe's work for being told in the first-person) *does* contain gothic motifs of rape, abandonment, and incest yet, unlike Peter, Ellen remains trapped within the world she describes and endures: unlike Peter, she neither reads nor tells her life as fiction.[22] In this context, Peter's stylized method of story-telling, which permeates the main body of 'Silford Hall', comes under fire in the epilogue.

The first section of the draft material closes with a reflection on Peter's inability to perceive the constricting effects of wealth and pleasure:

> Riches and all that we desire to gain
> Bind their Possessors in a golden Chain.
> 'Tis kept in Peril and 'tis lost in Pain.
> Not yet such cool Reflections reached our Youth.
> He was too blest to feel unwelcome Truth,
> Nor could conceive what he so much Enjoyed
> Had with its Beauty its Possessors cloyed.
> Their Time for such intense Delight was past;
> Raptures and Wonders are not made to last.
> All thou canst see, they many a Time have seen.
> Their Joys are over and their Minds serene;
> And Pleasure cannot be where it has wearied been. (79–90)

The shift in address within these lines—indicated in the turn from 'he' to 'thou', from the implied reader to Peter—is characteristic of the first segment of Crabbe's epilogue. The passage also allows two temporal perspectives to brush against one another: when addressing the reader, the narrator uses the past tense ('He was too blest…', 'Nor could recall…') but when turning to Peter he reverts to the present ('All thou canst see'). Peter can only see what he saw that day: his impression of Silford is time-defined rather than place-defined. The emphasis on dwelling in a given place and seeing its 'Beauty' 'many a Time' chimes with an element of *Rasselas* that Crabbe evokes allusively: the cloying of pleasure is an effect of repeated exposure. The implication is that it is not sheer age that wears away pleasure—as Crabbe had suggested in 1781 in *The Library*—but rather the process of re-visiting and re-evaluation. By the time he composed 'Silford Hall' in the early 1820s, Crabbe had experienced this pattern of return in his own life.

The second segment of the epilogue differs from the first in that the implied reader recedes and the narrator is left alone with Peter:

> Could'st thou have seen that in that noble Seat a Room
> Should be thine own, thy House, thy Hall, thy Home,
> With Leave to wander as thou would'st, to read
> Just as thy Fancy was disposed to feed,
> To live with those who were so far above
> Thy reach, it seem'd to thee a Crime to love,
> Or to admire them!—Little didst thou know
> How near approach the Lofty to the Low!
> In all we dare, and all we dare not name,

How much the Great and Little are the same!
But in thy Boyhood hadst thou dreamt thy Fate
Would one Day place thee in this envied State
To share with them the Genial Board unmoved
By painful Awe, by Greatness unreproved
It would have made thee to thy Awe a Prey
That when Fate called thou wouldst have lost thy Way
But thou hast found it now, thou hast closely seen
What Greatness has without it and within:
And where the Rapture flown? Inform us how
Thou art delighted and bewildered Now?
Where is the joyful Expectation?—fled!
The strong anticipating Spirit?—dead! (107–28)

Initially, the narrator appears to prophesy Peter's future. As the rhythms build impassioned momentum, however, narrative time skips away from the 'Happy Day' to catch up with the present moment ('But thou hast found it *now*', 'how | Thou art delighted and bewildered *Now*?'). It becomes evident that the narrator *is* the grown-up Peter; he has, in fact, been speaking of and addressing his younger self all along. The angry questioning becomes a form of interior interrogation ('Inform *us* how'); the delight and bewilderment, expectation and anticipation of youth have been snatched away by experience, and the boy's 'Spirit' is sealed in the final rhyme ('fled'/'dead'). The alternating voices and perspectives that structure the first manuscript segment (encouraging the reader to see Peter and the narrator as distinct individuals) collapse in a dénouement that shows not only that the two voices belong to the same person, but that that person is George Crabbe, who found a home in the 'Noble seat' of

Belvoir Castle as ducal chaplain. With a deftness that rivals Austen's, Crabbe captures the composite nature of the adult self within a third-person narrative discourse that channels and challenges its own youthful consciousness.

Crabbe left his *Posthumous Tales* 'quite prepared for the press', but final editorial decisions were made by his sons who worked with John Murray towards the publication of the eight-volume complete edition of 1834 (which substantiated the poet's nineteenth-century reputation).[23] It was perhaps Crabbe's responsibility to the Dukes of Rutland that led to his '[apparent] rejection' of the epilogue to 'Silford Hall' and, subsequently, the editorial decision to expunge over half of it for Murray's edition. The scattered extracts that Murray did print ('with considerable editorial emendation'[24]) are introduced with an explanation that:

> we think it right to preserve the following verses in a note, as they appear to leave little doubt that the story was in fact suggested by the Poet's recollection of his own boyish visits, when an apothecary's apprentice, to Cheveley, a seat of the noble family with whom, in after-years, he was domesticated as Chaplain.[25]

Murray is right to observe that 'Silford Hall' draws on Crabbe's recollection of running errands as a teenager to Rutland's hunting lodge, Cheveley Park.[26] As an over-worked and miserable fourteen-year-old delivering medicines, Crabbe's impression of Cheveley was perhaps like Peter's of Silford. Crabbe described his two-year apprenticeship at Wickhambrook in Suffolk (which involved more farm-labour than learning) as 'Slavery'; moreover, given that Crabbe's father was once a schoolmaster, this first experience of work is perhaps refigured in Peter's exploitation as a tutor.[27] Yet Murray's note reveals only one layer of the poem's autobiographical framework. Silford Hall is also modelled on Rutland's Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire, where Crabbe resided between May 1782 and May 1785 as

domestic chaplain to the fourth duke.[28] Situated on a hill overlooking the Vale of Belvoir, the seventeenth-century castle that Crabbe inhabited was 'a four-sided block, devoid of external ornament, surrounding a rectangular inner courtyard'. From 1800, however, it was remodelled by James Wyatt into a gothic-revival castle that would have suited Peter's expectations perfectly.[29] Crabbe's responses to Belvoir Castle and its estate were complex and they shifted as he encountered the place at different stages of life and in various personal and literary contexts.

Having given up the medical profession in January 1780, Crabbe travelled to London in search of literary patronage.[30] In 1781, on the brink of destitution, he gained the favour of Edmund Burke, who 'took up his cause … domesticated him under his own roof [at Gregories in Beaconsfield], and treated him like a son'.[31] Securing the chaplaincy at Belvoir, via Burke's intervention, eradicated Crabbe's financial vulnerability and brought his long-awaited marriage closer; as a place to live, however, he found it far from comfortable. Crabbe's biographer son noted that 'the situation he filled at Belvoir was attended with many painful circumstances, and productive in his mind of some of the acutest sensations of wounded pride that have ever been traced by any pen'.[32] Crabbe found himself in a delicate situation when, in early 1783, antagonism developed between Rutland and Burke.[33] As well as balancing differences in politics, Crabbe had to navigate a difficult social position. The duke spent 'the greater portion of his time [at Belvoir] in the exercise of boundless hospitality', but Crabbe was disinclined towards the 'constraint of ceremony' and both guests and servants treated him unkindly.[34] The disparity between the allegiances Crabbe felt or experienced, and those he was required to perform, is underscored by the 'astonishing fact' that he chose this moment to publish *The Village*.[35]

Having moved to a modest parsonage at Strathern (three miles from Belvoir) in 1785, Crabbe turned to the castle with the eyes of a natural historian and botanist rather than those

of a resident chaplain. In 1790 he compiled 'The natural history of the vale of Belvoir' for John Nichols' *Bibliotheca Topographia Britannica*, and in 1792 contributed an account of 'The Present State of Belvoir Castle' to Nichols' *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*.[36] The latter includes an architectural description of the chapel, an inventory of the duke's pictures, and Crabbe's observations of the trees and gardens which would provide the setting for Peter's afternoon nap at Silford (649–64).[37] In contrast to the impulse of Peter's 'Infant-Muse', the essay announces its concern with 'accuracy' and seeks to correct a 'very curious local and historical description' of Belvoir written in verse in 1722 by the antiquarian Francis Peck, in which 'imagination appears to have introduced many more [prospects] than the most accurate eye could take in'.[38] Crabbe's acerbic comments about Peck's poem ('whatever may be thought of the poetry') suggest his antiquarian scrupulosity.

Crabbe later cautioned Walter Scott against any enhanced impression of Belvoir when he learned that Scott envisaged the remodelled "medieval" castle along the same lines as Peck: 'I will not say', Crabbe wrote to Scott on 29 June 1814, 'that your Imagination has created its Beauties, but I must confess it has enlarged & adorned them'.[39] The letter explains that the gothic-revival castle is, however, 'a noble Place & stands on one intire [*sic*] Hill, taking up its whole surface & has a fine Appearance from the Window of my Parsonage at which I now sit'.[40] It was at the parsonage in Muston, in sight of Belvoir, that Crabbe composed 'The Patron'. Published in *Tales* (1812), this semi-autobiographical poem is a forerunner to 'Silford Hall'. It follows the experience of John, a young poet who, like Peter, loved to read of ghosts and murder, pirates, giants and spells; 'Inspired by feelings all such works infused, | John snatched his pen, and wrote as he perused' (26–7).[41] Taken up by a wealthy patron and invited to live at Brandon Hall (where he occupies the station of neither friend nor servant), John's imagination and personal aspiration prove to be his undoing when he falls in love with the patron's sister, who fatally breaks his heart. John's death muffles the

autobiographical resonances and the site of his real humiliation is his patron's London residence (perhaps a refiguration of Burke's Beaconsfield), rather than Brandon Hall.[42] Nonetheless, while Crabbe is careful to avoid direct parallels with Belvoir, 'The Patron' captures how he must have felt while living on Rutland's estate.

'The Patron' stands in contrast with the panegyric 'Belvoir Castle', which Crabbe composed in 1812 at the request of the fifth duke. This poem (printed in full by Murray in 1834) celebrates Belvoir as a symbol of the benignity, grace, and generosity of Rutland's ancestors stretching back beyond the Norman Conquest. A medieval ancestor who fears that 'Time destroys what Time cannot restore' (78) is proved wrong when a new castle emerges from the ruins of the old, promising power and glory to the family for centuries to come.[43] Despite the poem's obsequiousness, Crabbe peels back layers of human history at Belvoir, imagining the lives of its residents and those living in dependent parishes. The site gains significance through sheer longevity of dwelling and from place-based connections between present, past, and future inhabitants.

The future of the Rutland lineage is the subject of the next poem Crabbe composed in connection with Belvoir. 'Verses Written for the Fourth Day of January 1814' is an uninspired record of the birth of the fifth duke's son. Crabbe was present at the castle for the Christening, which was a 'high occasion' attended by the Prince Regent and the Duke of York involving a 'variety of magnificent entertainments'.[44] Crabbe's memories of this royal festival of pleasure may have been stirred several years later, in August 1822, when he next crossed paths with the Prince Regent (by then George IV) during a trip to Edinburgh. On this occasion, Crabbe was a guest of Scott who spent most of the visit occupied with the royal tour. Crabbe, meanwhile, visited Edinburgh Castle and Holyrood House, the account of which, given by J. G. Lockhart, contains parallels with moments in 'Silford Hall': Crabbe was shown around the castle by an 'old dame' with whom he struck up a sympathetic

exchange; at Holyrood he saw the canopied bed of Mary Queen of Scots, a sight similar to that which astonished Peter at Silford (317–24).[45] Given that composition of 'Silford Hall' is dated to sometime after May 1822, it seems likely that Crabbe's sightseeing in Edinburgh fed into his presentation of Peter's 'Happy Day'.[46]

To say that Belvoir Castle is *the* model for Silford Hall is thus to simplify the case. Crabbe's engagement with Belvoir was multi-layered and involved a complex process of return and maturation. Experiences (real or imagined) of Cheveley Park, of Belvoir Castle, of Beaconsfield, of Brandon Hall, and Edinburgh Castle—all of which signified as places of grandeur and amusement—helped Crabbe to evolve an amalgamated sense of place, which he perceived as a downtrodden errand-boy, an impoverished poet, a resident chaplain, a natural historian and antiquarian, a patronized bard, and an aging tourist. All of these locations and impressions are conflated in the fictionalized setting of 'Silford Hall'.

Crabbe describes such an understanding of the imaginative construction of place in *The Borough*. In the Preface to that work Crabbe explains that he chose not to give 'a more historical account of so considerable a Borough; —its charter, privileges, trade, public structures, and subjects of this kind' because of 'the difficulty of describing them, and … the utter repugnancy which subsists between the studies and objects of topography and poetry'.[47] The Preface is followed by a 'General Description' in verse, which Crabbe frames with the admission that it is not possible for a poet to depict 'all that gives distinction to a place' (4) and that 'The best description must be incomplete' (298). Both topographical and poetic description, Crabbe implies, are deficient. The reason for this necessary inadequacy, Fiona Stafford notes, is that the 'best description' lacks any testimony of the felt experience of place.[48] It also belies the effects of time. Crabbe's son's comment that his father had 'no real love for painting, or music, or architecture, or for what a painter's eye considers as the beauties of landscape' suggests, in this context, that Crabbe's interest in place was not

primarily aesthetic nor was it fixed to a particular momentary view.[49] Indeed, the reason Peter admired a Claude landscape in the gallery at Silford was that its 'lovely light' suggested 'neither day nor night' (429–30). As a botanist and geologist, however, Crabbe was alert to the value of slow observation as a means of understanding 'how Nature's work is done, | How slowly true she lays her Colours on'.[50] Peter never returned to Silford Hall but Crabbe did return, over five decades, to Belvoir, as both topographer and poet. Crabbe's youthful impressions were modified by slow observation and repeated experience and, in the process, the castle is transformed from a real place into a fictional one. The autobiographical elements revealed in the epilogue to 'Silford Hall' suggest that, through revisiting Belvoir, Crabbe gradually conflated modes of place-writing that he strained to separate in *The Borough*: in doing so, he offers a description that is less 'incomplete' because it captures the perspectives of the same individual at different stages of life.

Crabbe's Advice for the Young

Crabbe performed a less sophisticated version of 'Silford Hall's exchange between a younger and an older voice in 'The Patron'. The poem contains a two-hundred-line letter of advice to the budding poet John from his father. Concerned about the dangers of too much romantic reading, thinking, and composition, John's father warns the youngster to be alert to the lures of flattery and opulence, to disregard the whims of reviewers and the appeal of literary reputation. While Crabbe is able to draw on personal experience to convey support for both father and son in 'The Patron', the embedded epistle ensures the clear separation of the over-imaginative youth from the voice of experience. Jane Millgate has interpreted John's death as a consequence of Crabbe's inability and unwillingness to resolve the issue of carrying a romantic sensibility into adulthood; in 'Silford Hall', however, the difficulty is surmounted.[51] The premise of the epilogue—where the austere narrator *is* the grown-up Peter—seems to

contradict the conclusion of the main body of the tale, which indicates that Peter maintained his romantic vision into old age. The brokenness of the poem into published and manuscript sections appears to keep the two sensibilities apart; and yet, the distinction is blurred throughout. The germ of the older Peter was present on the 'Happy Day' itself: Mrs Johnson noted that Peter was 'So like a man, and yet so like a child' (382) and when the 'noble Pictures fill'd his mind with joy— | He gazed and thought, and was no more the boy' (372–3).[52] Reciprocally, 'the boy' remains present to the end of the epilogue as an addressee being lectured to by his mature self. Although Crabbe concludes with an assertion that Peter's youthful 'Spirit' is dead, the interior struggle performed in the final lines of the epilogue proves otherwise. The issue that could only be resolved through an embedded letter and a death in 'The Patron' is thrashed out through narrative style in 'Silford Hall'. The implication is that, however much it is tempered, a susceptibility to romance remains with Peter as he ages. By extension, the same is true of Crabbe.

In this light, the complete tale may be read as a response to those who saw in Crabbe's work (particularly *The Village* and *The Parish Register*) too little imagination and amusement; indeed, in 'Silford Hall' we catch Crabbe having this argument with himself as the elder voice points out where 'the boy' went wrong. That boy, however, has much in common with Crabbe's Romantic adversaries.

Hazlitt, Crabbe's keenest critic, asserted in 1818 that 'to read him is a penance, yet we read on!'[53] Hazlitt linked Crabbe's 'repining' dreariness with too much 'literal' description: not only does he 'deal in incessant matters of fact, but in matters of fact of the most familiar, the least animating, and the most unpleasant kind'.[54] Hazlitt connected this lack of readerly amusement with an absence of poetic vision and, hence, concluded that 'for the most part' Crabbe is a poet 'only because he writes in lines of ten syllables'.[55] Wordsworth agreed. Commenting on *The Village* in a letter to Samuel Rogers of 1808, he described Crabbe's

verse as 'in no sense' earning the title 'poetry': 'nineteen out of 20 of Crabbe's Pictures are mere matters of fact; with which the Muses have just about as much to do as they have with a Collection of medical reports, or of Law Cases'.[56] Crabbe acknowledged and rejected such criticism in the Preface to *Tales* (1812) but to no avail.[57] The prevailing image of him as an unpoetic killjoy is crystalized in an apocryphal anecdote from a meeting between Crabbe, Wordsworth, and Sir George Beaumont at Murray's in London. The 'object' of the story (according to Scott who recorded it) 'was to show that Crabbe had no imagination'. Having blown out a candle, Beaumont '[exchanged] a look with Wordsworth' and 'began to admire in silence the undulating thread of smoke which slowly rose from the expiring wick'. Their 'admiration of beautiful and evanescent forms' was quashed when Crabbe, unthinkingly, 'put on the extinguisher'.[58]

Such accounts of Crabbe's lack of imaginative vision extend a critical trend that began in the 1750s when Pope was denounced 'unpoetic'. Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756) and Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) pointed to his didacticism, the clarity of his language and imagery, and the precision of his versification to argue that Pope was 'no poet'.[59] The attack was, at least in part, crafted to sully Pope's reputation and to frame his style as an anomaly in literary history; in effect, it marked the first stirrings of the Romantic Movement. Warton and Young argued that Pope's verse lacks imagination, emotional depth, and sublimity; his perceived coldness became a yard-stick against which to measure the imaginative warmth and lyric intensity of modern poetry. It was in the context of Romantic thinking about the value of the imagination and the purpose of poetry that Crabbe seemed cool and objective.[60]

Coleridge reaches the heart of the matter in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), where he identifies '*matter-of-factness*' as one of the 'defects' of Wordsworth's poetry.[61] The tendency towards 'a laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects' (a charge

equally applicable to Crabbe) renders descriptive verse unpoetic: this is because the imagination, which is 'essentially vital', has too little bearing on the objects of description, which are 'fixed and dead'.[62] It comes down to pleasure. According to Coleridge, the presence of the living power of the imagination makes poetry pleasurable. In other words, the pleasure to be gained from poetry is a matter of amusement (that is, distraction from reality) rather than accurate description of objects as they are. By this reasoning—which extends and qualifies the importance of pleasure stressed by Wordsworth in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*—matter-of-fact verse is neither pleasurable nor "poetic".[63]

'Silford Hall' shows Crabbe putting this aesthetic theory to the test. The main body of the tale embraces an imaginative vision of the world and expresses sympathy towards childhood experience, acknowledging the value of pleasure in Peter's life; Crabbe forsakes matter-of-factness and, consequently, the poem has been singled out as Crabbe's most Romantically-inclined piece of work. Having been fed on "pleasurable" verse, however, Peter fails to see how pleasures become outworn; he fails to heed the Johnsonian warning that 'Pleasure, in itself harmless, may become mischievous, by endearing to us a state which we know to be transient and probatory'.[64] While the circular structure of Peter's 'Happy Day' suggests that his pleasure leads nowhere, Crabbe's unpublished epilogue indicates that, through revisiting rather than retelling, Peter's understanding matures.[65] For Coleridge, attending to the 'Surface of Things' leads to 'unpoetic' verse whereas deeper engagement is imaginative and productive of pleasure. For Crabbe, the opposite is the case: the surface view is enchanted and pleasurable while invariably the deeper vision is more discomforting. As Crabbe's epilogue offers a commentary on Peter's childhood outlook, it also constitutes a critique of Romantic vision.

Taking account of the epilogue and its implications, the main body of 'Silford Hall' comes to look like the poetic equivalent of a straw man, and the whole tale a retort to those

younger readers who claimed Crabbe lacked imagination and that his work proffered little pleasure. Crabbe implies that it would be wrong to expect a mature man (who knows 'What Greatness has without it and within') to champion 'amusement' wholeheartedly; and yet, with its multi-perspective narrative discourse, 'Silford Hall' grants imagination and pleasure their rightful place in Crabbe's poetic development.[66] Putting the main body of 'Silford Hall' back together with its epilogue reveals that, for Crabbe, the noblest function of art is not to add an imaginative filter to the world that beguiles or conceals the truth, not to elevate and inspire, not to give false hope or false happiness but to communicate the lessons of repeated experience. As such, 'Silford Hall' epitomizes what Christopher Ricks describes as Crabbe's 'responsible imagination'.[67]

Crabbe was not, of course, able to give his childhood self any such advice yet he could council his beloved granddaughter: 'Reading for amusement *only* is not the satisfaction of a reasonable being', he wrote, and one wants to imagine little Caroline Crabbe reading 'Silford Hall' in manuscript. At the age of almost seventy, Crabbe collapses the divide between youth and age, creating a deeply personal reflection on poetry, pleasure, and place. The submerged warning that he sketched out for his younger peers (poets as well as readers) reframes the caution pronounced by Johnson at the start of *Rasselas*:

> Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow; attend to the history of Rasselas prince of Abissinia.[68]

The warning may have been too old-fashioned to risk printing the poem in its entirety in 1834; yet Crabbe was holding the torch, through the Romantic period, for a tradition that would soon pass into Victorian fiction.

[1] *Selected Letters and Journals of George Crabbe*, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford, 1985), 360.

[2] Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, 3 vols. ed. Edith J. Morley, 3. 81; William Hazlitt, 'Living Authors – Crabbe, No. V', *London Magazine*, 17 (May 1821), 484–90 (486); Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Table-Talk, recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)*, 2 vols. ed. Carl Woodring (London, 1990), 2. 296.

[3] F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (New York, 1963), 125. Crabbe places himself in the line of Dryden and Pope is his Preface to *Tales* (1812). Frank Whitehead analyses Crabbe's eighteenth-century affinities and concludes that his 'whole outlook is based on a firm belief in the characteristically Augustan values of sense, judgment, balance and moderation'; 'Crabbe's firm attachment to rational values links him with the Augustan tradition in far more than a purely literary sense'. See *George Crabbe: A Reappraisal* (London, 1995), 18.

[4] Caroline Matilda Crabbe (daughter of Crabbe's eldest son, George) was born in 1818. Neil Powell describes Crabbe's attachment to Caroline in *George Crabbe: An English Life* (London, 2004), 323–4.

[5] *The Life of George Crabbe, by his Son* (1834; London, 1932), 14.

[6] 'The Library', in *George Crabbe: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Norma Dalrymple-Champneys, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1988), 1. 131.

[7] Peter New, *George Crabbe's Poetry* (London, 1976), 234; Whitehead, *A Reappraisal*, 150. New notes that 'Silford Hall' is Crabbe's 'only sustained rendering of pre-adult life' (234).

[8] Quotation of 'Silford Hall; or The Happy Day' is taken from Dalyrymple-Champney's *Complete Poetical Works*, 3. 3–24. Hereafter *CPW*. Line numbers are given in parentheses.

[9] D. N. Gallon traces the mock-heroic tropes in 'Silford Hall or the Happy Day', *Modern Language Review*, 61 (1966), 384–94.

[10] While Peter New notes that the Hall 'is linked with the exoticism of Peter's reading' (*George Crabbe's Poetry*, 229), specific connections with *Rasselas* have not be made before.

[11] Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, ed. J. P. Hardy (Oxford, 1988), 3.

[12] Tennyson described Crabbe's meter as 'a merciless sledge-hammer thud'. See Arthur Pollard (ed.), *George Crabbe: The Critical Heritage* (1972; London, 1995), 368.

[13] Johnson, *Rasselas*, 6–7.

[14] Through the patronage of Burke, Crabbe met Reynolds, who passed *The Village* to Johnson for comment. An account of the episode is given in *Life of George Crabbe*, 113–14. Quotation is from *The Village*, Book 1, lines 49–54 and 19–20: see Dalrymple-Champneys commentary in *CPW*, 1. 666. The revision brings the sentiment in line with the eighteenth-century aesthetic theory of 'ideal form'.

[15] It is for this reason that Oliver F. Sigworth suggests 'Silford Hall' sits at a distance from Crabbe's other tales of 'disillusionment'. See *"Nature's Sternest Painter": Five Essays on the Poetry of George Crabbe* (Tucson, 1965), 51.

[16] The 'rejected ending' to 'Silford Hall' (which appears in notebooks C2 and O2) is reproduced in *CPW*, 3. 503–6, from which I have taken all quotation.

[17] Crabbe creates a structure that resembles Wordsworth's 'Old Man Travelling' (1798), where an ambiguous description clarifies in light of a tonally different conclusion that was later detached from the main body of the poem. See Jessica Fay, 'Sketching and the Acquisition of Taste: Wordsworth, Reynolds, and Sir George Beaumont', *RES*, 69 (2018), 706–24 (716–19).

[18] Robert L. Chamberlain, *George Crabbe* (New York, 1965), 161; Peter New concludes that '[i]n essence it is not a tale with a moral, but an acute exploration of early adolescent experience' (*George Crabbe's Poetry*, 234).

[19] As Christopher Ricks has shown, Crabbe had a sustained fascination (grounded in personal experience) with confinement and imprisonment. Ricks teases out ways in which Crabbe uses couplets to negotiate freedom within constraint in 'George Crabbe's Thoughts of Confinement', *Essays in Appreciation* (Oxford, 1996), 76–89.

[20] Perhaps aiming to eliminate clumsy repetition, these lines were among those cut to create the addendum printed by John Murray in *Poetical Works of Rev. George Crabbe*, 8 vols. (London, 1834), 8. 32–4.

[21] Gavin Edwards, 'Scott and Crabbe: A Meeting at the Border', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 22 (1998), 123–40 (132). Quotation of *The Borough* is from *CPW*, 1. 544.

[22] 'Ellen Orford' is the only poem in which Crabbe employed a first-person narrative until his extensive experimentation with that mode began in *Tales of the Hall* (1819). See Whitehead, *A Reappraisal*, 125.

[23] *Life of George Crabbe*, 297–8. Murray had bought the copyright of Crabbe's poetry in 1819. See Thomas C. Faulkner, 'George Crabbe: Murray's 1834 Edition of the Life and Poems', *Studies in Bibliography,* 32 (1997), 246–52 for an overview of the edition.

[24] Dalrymple-Champneys notes that the manuscript lines are 'practically unpunctuated' (*CPW*, 3. 503). Murray inserted quotation marks to demarcate Peter's voice, removing the possibility of free indirect narration. See *Poetical Works of Rev. George Crabbe*, 8. 32.

[25] *Poetical Works of Rev. George Crabbe*, 8. 32.

[26] The reference is noted in *CPW*, 3. 379; *Life of George Crabbe*, 18–19; *Poetical Works of Rev. George Crabbe*, 8. 32.

[27] *Selected Letters and Journals*, 9–10; Powell, *An English Life,* 2–3.

[28] Crabbe acknowledged his debt to the Rutland family in dedications to *Tales* (1812) and *Tales of the Hall* (1819).

[29] *Selected Letters and Journals*, 388. In 1816, a huge fire destroyed an entire wing of the castle, along with eleven Reynolds paintings. The castle was rebuilt under the direction of John Thoroton. See Powell, *An English Life*, 277.

[30] *Life of George Crabbe*, 48.

[31] *Life of George Crabbe*, 90.

[32] *Life of George Crabbe*, 108.

[33] See R. B. Hatch, 'George Crabbe, the Duke of Rutland and the Tories', *RES*, 24 (1973), 429–43. Hatch describes Rutland as an 'enlightened humanitarian' (437).

[34] *Life of George Crabbe*, 107 and 109.

[35] Powell, *An English Life*, 93. The first book of *The Village* was conceived in 1780. Crabbe's ducal chaplaincy explains the disconnection between the two books of the poem, the second of which contains a lengthy eulogy of Rutland's deceased brother.

[36] Thomas C. Faulkner gives an account of the publication history of Crabbe's contributions to Nichols' work in *Selected Letters and Journals*, 34 n. 1.

[37] Crabbe, 'The Present State of Belvoir Castle, 1792' in John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, vol. 2, pt. 1 (1795), 69–74. The inventory of pictures (supplied to Crabbe by Rev. William Peters) includes five landscapes by Claude, numerous portraits by Reynolds, and singles out for comment 'eight of the best finished and most pleasing performances' by 'Teniers, that Child of Nature' (71).

[38] 'The Present State of Belvoir Castle', 69.

[39] *Selected Letters and Journals*, 113. Scott refers to Crabbe as the 'Belvoir bard' in a letter of 1 June 1813 (*Selected Letters and Journals*, 110).

[40] *Selected Letters and Journals*, 113.

[41] *CPW*, 2. 66.

[42] Powell suggests that 'The Patron' also draws on Crabbe's frustrated attempt to gain patronage from Lord North in 1780 (*An English Life*, 215).

[43] *CPW*, 3. 331–5.

[44] *Life of George Crabbe*, 203. 'Verses written for the Fourth Day of January 1814', *CPW*, 3. 337–41. This visit to Belvoir perhaps provoked Crabbe's well-known comment that he was treated by the fifth duke as one of the 'old race'; that is, a hanger-on from the days of his father's hospitality (*Life of George Crabbe*, 196–7).

[45] Lockhart's account appears in *Life of George Crabbe*, 265. Crabbe mentions the canopied bed in his own journal of the trip given in *Selected Letters and Journals*, 295.

[46] See editorial commentary in *CPW*, 3. 371.

[47] *CPW*, 2. 344.

[48] Fiona Stafford, '"Of Sea or River": Crabbe's Best Description', *Romanticism*, 20 (2014), 162–73 (162).

[49] *Life of George Crabbe*, 158. Crabbe explains in a letter of 1 October 1792 that 'People speak with Raptures of fine Prospects, clear Skies, Lawns, Parks and the blended Beauties of Art and Nature, but give me a wild, wide Fen, in a foggy Day' (*Selected Letters and Journals*, 51).

[50] *The Borough*, 'Letter II', ll. 63–6 (*CPW*, 1. 372). Ricks notes that Crabbe's love of geology, especially after the death of his wife, 'informed his art' ('Thoughts of Confinement', 87).

[51] Jane Millgate, 'Scott and the Dreaming Boy: A Context for Waverley', *RES*, 32 (1981), 286–93 (288). Millgate argues that Scott bridges this gap by shifting from verse romance to novels.

[52] In retrospect, Crabbe's use of the definite article here is ominous.

[53] 'Living Authors', 484.

[54] 'Living Authors', 486, 484.

[55] 'Living Authors', 485. Sigworth explores the genealogy of Hazlitt's comment in *Nature's Sternest Painter*, 158.

[56] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth; the Middle Years, Part i*., ed. Mary Moorman (Oxford, 1969), 268.

[57] In the preface to *Tales* Crabbe rejects claims that 'those who address their productions to the plain sense and sober judgment of their Readers, rather than to their fancy and imagination' preclude themselves from the company of poets (*CPW*, 2. 8–9).

[58] William Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 10 vols. (1903), 9. 56. Crabbe's first meeting with Scott was in London in March 1820 (Powell, *An English Life*, 326). The party in question perhaps took place around this time. Not only does the vignette imply that Crabbe lacked the imaginative vision of a poet, it suggests he was also without that of an 'exquisite painter' like Beaumont. Richard Hoffpauir's *Romantic Fallacies* (New York, 1986), uses this anecdote to elevate Crabbe's plainness and purity over Wordsworth's art.

[59] Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, 4th edition (1782), 1. 165–75.

[60] Robert J. Griffin, *Wordsworth's Pope* (Cambridge, 1995). According to Griffin's version of literary historiography Crabbe would fall into the Augustan camp, clinging on to a Popean aesthetic as Romantic tastes for imaginative writing accelerated.

[61] *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. in 1 (Princeton, 1983), 2. 126. In the Fenwick Note to 'Lucy Gray', Wordsworth explains that: 'The way in which the incident was treated & the spiritualizing of the character might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative influences which I have endeavoured to throw over common life with Crabbe's matter of fact style of treating subjects of the same kind': *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London, 1993), 2.

[62] *Biographia Literaria*, 2. 126.

[63] *Biographia Literaria*, 2. 13. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth argues that the 'end of poetry' is the production of 'excitement in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure': *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1974), 1. 146.

[64] Johnson, *Rasselas*, 117.

[65] Crabbe echoes Johnson's comment in an essay on 'The Luxury of Vain Imagination'. It is necessary, Johnson argues here, to 'break' out of the 'captivity' of 'amusement' in order to 'look back with satisfaction from … old age upon … earlier years': *The Rambler*, 89 (22 January 1751), 184–9 (186).

[66] As Jerome McGann explains, Crabbe's conception of poetic pleasure was much less totalizing and divine than that of his Romantic peers. See 'The Anachronism of George Crabbe', *ELH*, 48 (1981), 555–72 (556–9).

[67] Ricks, 'Thoughts of Confinement', 77.

[68] Johnson, *Rasselas*, 1.