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# An Analysis of Some Characteristics of Realism in the Borough of George Crabbe and in the Spoon River Anthology of Edgar Lee Masters

Lawrence J. Flynn  
*Loyola University Chicago*

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AN ANALYSIS OF SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF REALISM IN  
THE BOROUGH OF GEORGE CRABBE AND IN THE  
SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY OF EDGAR LEE MASTERS

by

Lawrence J. Flynn, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of Master  
of Arts in Loyola University

July 1946

## VITA

Lawrence J. Flynn, S.J. was born in Bellevue, Kentucky, September 5, 1914.

He was graduated from St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati, Ohio, June 8, 1931.

The Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in English was conferred by Xavier University, June 12, 1936.

From September, 1936 to June, 1937 he attended the College of Law of the University of Cincinnati.

In September, 1937 he entered the Milford Novitiate of the Society of Jesus where he studied the classics before going to West Baden in 1940 to study philosophy for three years. At West Baden during the summer of 1941 he began his graduate work in English. Since that time he has taken courses in English at West Baden and on the Loyola campus.

From 1943 to 1946 he taught English and Latin in Loyola Academy, Chicago, Illinois.

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE PURPOSE OF THE THESIS - REALISM - NATURALISM

The purpose of this thesis is to study certain characteristics of Realism in the Borough and in the Spoon River Anthology, with a view to determining the precise difference between the Realism of George Crabbe and that of Edgar Lee Masters in these two works.

In other words, the objective is to ascertain certain features of Realism in the Borough as they are manifested in Crabbe's peculiar kind of setting, characterization, and attitude. A similar examination will be made of the Anthology, special attention being paid to evidences of Naturalism. A comparison will be drawn to show that Masters is a Naturalist whose Realism, although it differs only in degree, has distinctive qualities about it.

This "Introduction" will outline at some length the nature and significance of Realism and of Naturalism as well as the intimate relationship between them. The method employed will be to divide the study of each work into three separate sections: setting, characterization, and attitude. As far as possible, overlapping will be reduced to a minimum. After the Borough has been analyzed in three chapters according to the divisions just mentioned, the Anthology will be submitted to a similar investigation; but in addition, comparison and contrast with elements already considered in the Borough will enter. Thus, in the first three chapters no reference will be made to the Anthology, but in the last three dealing with the latter constant vigilance will be exercised for making comparisons and contrasts

with Realism in the Borough. Wherever possible, primary sources will be used in a sufficient number to demonstrate the points under consideration. Since the attitude cannot be so completely determined from the author's writings alone, considerable attention must be paid to such personal factors as the disposition of the author, his environment, training, and beliefs. This procedure furnishes a background in fact. With a factual basis established, the poems will be examined to determine precisely how they reflect the attitude of the authors. A final chapter will serve to draw together chief observations and to summarize the comparisons made in the analysis.

Before commencing a discussion of the nature of Realism and of Naturalism, it is fitting to mention related work that has been done in the field of this thesis. Varley Howe Lang<sup>1</sup> in a dissertation has made a study of certain aspects of Realism in Crabbe's work in general. This is a very detailed study, the most complete analysis in the last thirty years of Realism in Crabbe. Eugene E. Gardner<sup>2</sup> has written a thesis in which he compares the Realism of Wordsworth's "Excursion" with that in Crabbe's "Village." Franklin P. Batdorf<sup>3</sup> wrote a dissertation concerning the "Tales" of Crabbe, but there is no special consideration given to Realism.

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<sup>1</sup>Varley Howe Lang, "Crabbe and the Eighteenth Century, a Portion of Some Aspects of George Crabbe's Realism" (unpublished dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, 1938).

<sup>2</sup>Eugene E. Gardner, "Realism in Wordsworth and Crabbe" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1924).

<sup>3</sup>Franklin P. Batdorf, "A Study of Crabbe's 'Tales'" (unpublished dissertation, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1941).

As a literary movement with definite tendencies based upon principles, with disciples, with creditable literary output, Romanticism arose with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, and Shelley. But as a fact, Romanticism dates to the Elizabethan period when many similar characteristics of feeling and emotion, respect for the antiquities, and love of nature were prominent. Indeed, these same characteristics can be gleaned from earlier literature.

Much the same is true of Realism as a movement and as a fact. As a definite literary movement, it developed towards the middle of the nineteenth century. As a fact in literature, it has existed at least since the time of Aristotle who mentioned this method of treatment in the Poetics.

Like many of the "-isms" of the present day, Realism is used in different senses by different people. To some it connotes much more than others allow. For a better understanding of the term, an effort will be made to establish the generally accepted notion and also the precise sense in which it is used in the present discussion.

Dostoievsky has defined Reality as, "Man's relations with God and Satan." Obviously, this is too abbreviated for the satisfactory expression of a literary method and manifests a viewpoint much at variance with that of the literary "Realists." William D. Howells calls it ". . . nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material. . . ."4 The vagueness of this is also apparent. The dictionary definition brings the student to a more complete understanding of Realism:

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<sup>4</sup>William D. Howells, "Realism and the American Novel," in American Critical Essays, XIXth and XXth Centuries, Norman Foerster, editor, (Oxford University Press, London, 1930), p. 144.



In art and literature, fidelity to nature or to real life; representation without idealization, adherence to actual fact. As a consciously professed principle, realism was opposed in the nineteenth century critical discussions to romanticism (which see) taken as typically subjective and inclining to the sentimental and extravagant. Its adherents have laid stress on the rendering of literal fact, on "truth to nature" without selection either of subject or detail in the interest of preconceived ideals. The term is applied in a favorable sense to denote accuracy and graphicalness in delineation, and depreciatively to denote excessive minuteness of detail and preoccupation with trivial, sordid, or offensive subjects.<sup>5</sup>

With this exposition, William F. Thrall and Addison Hibbard<sup>6</sup> agree, save that when it is used in the derogatory sense, it is then called Naturalism. A description from a recent book on literary development indicates the origin of Realism:

Realism may be described as the attempt to give a reproduction of life as actually lived by the average person, or by what in the author's experience is the average person, and it was the natural accompaniment in literature of the new scientific discoveries that rocked the world in the nineteenth century - in fact, the literary doctrine of the new, material civilization which had been given the world by science.<sup>7</sup>

Strangely enough, Realism is somewhat contradictory because it professes to treat life as it actually is but rarely presents the whole truth.

<sup>5</sup>Webster's New International Dictionary (unabridged) Second Edition, 1944, p. 2072.

<sup>6</sup>William F. Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature with an Outline of Literary History, English and American (Doubleday Doran and Co., Inc., Garden City, New York, 1936), pp. 357-59.

<sup>7</sup>Mrs. Mary Colum, From These Roots (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1937), p. 223.

In rebellion from other rival methods of literary treatment, it attaches itself to the ugly, the coarse, the vicious in human existence; it shuns selection of the better things in life. But is not beauty a reality in the world? Are evil and vice more of a reality than virtue and happiness? History shows and experience reveals that goodness possesses more of reality, more of permanence than evil.

Since "reality" or the "truth of reality" is the objective of the Realist, his subject-matter can readily be divided into those objects that are external or physical, and those that are internal or psychological.<sup>9</sup> Physical Realism considers all those details that are extra-mental. Clearly, this class embraces an unlimited number of concrete things--any object that the Realist can literally touch with his hands. Of all these objects, a certain type is more congenial to the grasp of the Realist. He does not rhapsodize upon the hidden beauties of the daisy, as Chaucer does, although he sees the flower. Nor does he visit poor villagers and in partaking of their humble repast forget their condition of want, as Wordsworth or any other Romanticist might do. The Realist appears not to be looking for beauty, or if he is, he seems to find it in the drab, unaccustomed things of life. With this frame of mind, he may easily become a Psychological Realist whose material, being the inner-workings of the mind, becomes more subtle since he probes further and further into the recesses of the soul, searching for hidden motives that impel men to action.

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<sup>9</sup>Arthur McDowall, Realism: a Study in Art and Thought (Constable and Co. Ltd., London, 1918), p. 24.

According to purpose, Realism is sometimes called Higher or Semi-Realism and Lower, or merely Realism.<sup>10</sup> Higher Realism, according to Mrs. Colum, means a less violent, more accustomed, more artistic treatment of objects made without too much demand upon creative imagination. On the other hand, Lower Realism, intolerant of artists and their principles, is more the work of a tradesman who is bent on forcing literature to serve some special object he has in view. This latter type of procedure is the mark of the Realist as generally accepted, the Higher Realist being excluded by reason of his aim to produce an illusion of life, a picture more perfect, more convincing than life itself.

Realism in literature is opposed to Idealism, which aims to make things conform to some preconceived ideal. Its relation to Romanticism has been mentioned. As to Naturalism, there is in it a gradual development which consists largely in an exaggeration of practically everything that Realism aims at. More specific treatment of this difference will be considered later in this section.

The method of the Realist has been suggested by Taine, that is, to note facts, choose important and significant ones, and to substantiate them fully.<sup>11</sup> The Goncourts used the word "reportage" which included: facts, observation, the human document, and reportage.<sup>12</sup> These can be suitably considered under the various divisions of setting, character, and attitude of the Realist.

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<sup>10</sup>Mrs. Colum, p. 223.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 221-22.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

When the Realist prepares his stage, he sets it in the pattern of contemporaneous time, throwing off all theorizing of the Idealist, the pastoralism of the Classicist, and the imagination and emotion of the Romanticist. Thus, he arrives at real, concrete, objective things in life, untainted by fancy. He deals with the lower class of people; he moves about them in their everyday occurrences and in their most personal moments; he bears their troubles and engages in their small-talk; he handles man-made objects, not so much those of nature and visits busy street-scenes; he sees workers in their hours of sweat and toil; he pines with them in their misery, victims of fate.

The characters that complete the setting are men and women who are individuals in ordinary life, not types. They are dominated by the ruling hand of Fate. But the Realist likes to trace the course of their destiny, getting behind the scenes, even into their minds, where he can watch the progress of cause and effect, where he can disclose to others the flaw which sets into motion the gradual decay that spells ruin for them in the end.

The spirit of foreboding appears at times as a large cloud of misery, despair, disappointment, and disillusion which somehow seems ever to be within ready summons. In short notice it comes into the picture and then gives way to somewhat lighter moods. In such interims the Realist appears more delightful. He engages in humor. He satirizes the conditions of the poor and the unfortunate. He even enters the realm of irony bringing with him a tragic element with its emotions of terror and of pity. So much for the method of the Realist.

A survey of English literature up to 1800 would reveal authors who have

used one or other of the three divisions of the Realistic school. Chaucer, to mention one name, has done this. But the school of Realists did not emerge until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Wordsworth had used Realistic subject-matter, as had many other poets. Crabbe was one of the first, however, to evoke the entire method and to defend it in his "Preface" to the "Tales," calling it "actuality of relation, nudity of description, poetry without an atmosphere,"<sup>13</sup> the word "realism" being unknown at that time.

By 1850 the word was applied to the painting of Courbet in France, and shortly afterwards it was applied in literature to Flaubert's Madame Bovary, to works of Balzac, Zola, Verlaine, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud. Next, it travelled to Germany as "realismus" in the Soll und Haben of Freytag and of others. In Russia, Turgenov, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy have been classed as Realists. Norway contributed Ibsen, while in England where literature had always been traditionally Romantic, it arose from the pen of George Eliot in Adam Bede, from Thackeray, and from Dickens. James Joyce, influenced by so-called Freudian Psychology, added to Psychological Realism with his Ulysses.<sup>14</sup> In the United States, Howells represented Eastern Realism which wove into one design a kind of Realism, gentility, and Idealism. In the West, it took on the character of the "democratic tradition most evident in the universal and intense efforts of farmers in economic and political strug-

<sup>13</sup>George Crabbe, The Poetical Works of George Crabbe (Gall and Inglis, Edinburgh, [n.d.] p. 263.

<sup>14</sup>Note: this reference to the first usage of the word "Realism" and development in other countries is found in an article by Edward E. Hale, "The Earlier Realism," Union College Bulletin: Faculty Papers, Number 25, (Albany, New York. Union College, January, 1932), pp. 3-11.

gles."<sup>15</sup>

To all of this the obvious question may be: Why Realism? Why did it develop at this particular period? The answer is not difficult. Many men tried to escape from classical tendencies. Hard realities of life were brought to the fore with the advent of new ideas born of the French Revolution. The Industrial Revolution had been in full swing for forty years bringing new methods of manufacture, new opportunities, problems, and needs. It carried men's minds from spiritual things and left them face to face with facts--even grim facts. Social problems of a different sort arose and "Literature becomes realistic when artists and critics begin to study social problems."<sup>16</sup>

Now, in considering such a term as Naturalism, ambiguity can be avoided by means of a careful analysis of it. The dictionary describes it in the following manner:

. . . the principles and characteristics professed or represented by a 19th century school of realistic writers, notably by Zola and Maupassant, who aimed to give a literal transcription of reality, and laid stress on the analytic study of character, and on the scientific and experimental nature of their observation of life.<sup>17</sup>

Thrall and Hibbard enlarge upon this type of Realism in the following:

Naturalism is less selective, more all-inclusive than realism . . . . The Realist selects according to some purpose details which relate to his

<sup>15</sup>Bernard Smith, Forces in American Literature, a Study in the History of American Literary Thought (Harcourt Brace and Co., New York, 1939), p.138.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 135

<sup>17</sup>Webster's Dictionary, p. 1631.

intent; the naturalist also selects, but in his desire to create a definite impression in the mind of his reader he reserves unto himself the right to go wherever he will for his material . . . we charge naturalism with sex only because the naturalistic writer insists on his privilege of using the biological and medical as well as the social aspect of love -- on using whatever material he finds ready to his pen.<sup>18</sup>

Dargan has said that Naturalism is the "reductio ad absurdum of Realism."<sup>19</sup> This is quite true since Naturalism purports to give the rock-bottom explanation of the "truth" concerning anything on earth. This results in an extension of the subject-matter and also the method of treating "Realistic" topics.

Obviously, the kind and number of objects that fall under consideration of the Naturalist is very great. In fact, he claims the right of legitimate access to any detail, however insignificant, however objectionable, as long as it serves to create the impression he seeks. This undergoes selection of a sort, but it opens the door to a host of abnormal people, psychoses, and topics forbidden by good taste. The freedom that the Naturalist claims is that of a large unabridged dictionary, and the frankness with which he chooses his materials suggests itself almost as a religious principle.

It is not only a fearless introduction of all kinds of topics that marks the Naturalist but especially an analytical investigation of his material. The procedure under searching eyes of a Naturalist becomes much more scientific, photographic, and journalistic than that of the Realist. His

<sup>18</sup>Thrall and Hibbard, p. 267f.

<sup>19</sup>Edwin Preston Dargan, Studies in Balzac's Realism (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1932), p. 14.

procedure and method prompt him to compile countless irrelevant facts that can be of only slight assistance. This causes him to introduce tedious minutiae, very commonplace observations, and sordid details. For instance, Zola in one of his novels enters into a very careful analysis of the ingredients of bath-water of one of his characters, as if the reader is much benefited in knowing that to the water had been added salts of a certain refinement and perfume of a peculiar flavor and strength. The Naturalist busies himself with making a photographic record of his victim's family background, his parents, sisters, brothers; his enemies, his admirers.<sup>20</sup> Such a painful investigation is rendered more startling by his journalistic style which, though interesting enough, employs a rough language that suggests crudeness and lack of taste.

To fashion an appropriate setting, the Naturalistic artist needs do little revamping to the procedure of the Realist. Both men work under the penetrating rays of tremendous searchlights whose powerful beams reach into the most hidden secrets of dismayed, disillusioned creatures. The Naturalist occupies himself with more trivial, inconsequential, and generally sordid details of the environs of his characters. He works with a spotlight whose analyzing power defies concealment of any virtue or vice, and always he is more interested in vice. With the set purpose of submitting everything to a scientific analysis and to the photographer's faithful lens, he takes up where the Realist left off. His telling rays reveal what is objectionable in man's physical, social, and moral life. In the selection of material he steps even beyond somewhat flimsy boundaries erected by his Realist comrade.

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<sup>20</sup>Mrs. Colum, p. 112.



In describing the setting of the Naturalist, a consideration of his attitude towards his material has already crept in. That attitude or method is colored by several convictions. First of all, he despises convention because he is part of a system of modernism which has shunned authority, faith, and the so-called hypocrisies of preceding decades. Relishing his position of revolutionist, he coasts along in his photographic accuracy, overstressing sex, sordid and obscene details, emphasizing environment and atmosphere at the expense of plot.<sup>21</sup> His turn of mind from a conventional to a bizarre position has been influenced by emphasis on the sex instinct in life, which makes a parade of every manifestation of love and affection that suits his purpose. Professor Luccock of Yale Divinity School ridicules this attitude thus: "There is no truth but mud, and I am its prophet!"<sup>22</sup> Another strong influence has been the Determinism that broods over the world. There is not much place allowed to Providence. Free-will is minimized. Chance or Fatalism like that of Hardy's can become Determinism that is physical, social and economic, leaving man helpless against the forces of environment and the impersonal processes of modern industry.<sup>23</sup>

Equipped with such a frame of mind, with such telling locale, the Naturalist lacks only one element to make the picture complete. This is character-portrayal. Very little personal interpretation enters; the author

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<sup>21</sup>Vivian de Sola Pinto, "Realism in English Poetry," in Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, XXV (1940), p. 85.

<sup>22</sup>Halford E. Luccock, Contemporary American Literature and Religion (Willett, Clark, and Co., New York, 1934), p. 58.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

dissects man, a species of animal, ". . . as a Naturalist scientist studies plants and animals."<sup>24</sup> Many of his characters, even his best ones are quite low in the moral scale, and those that are not low often are only half-blown. In his work with characters he resembles the Psychological Realist who is interested in motives and in the inner working of the human machine. Here again the difference is one of degree. Both disciples are guided by a physiological consideration of man: his appetites and bodily phenomena; his low passions and desires; his ruling and driving impulse, which they look upon as sex. But the Naturalist plunges ahead beyond all limits, apparently delighting in the muck and filth he generates.

As in tracing the roots of Realism we find indications in ancient times, so we can find sparks of Naturalism in the classic writers. Homer, Plautus, and Juvenal have been mentioned as forerunners,<sup>25</sup> but their Naturalism is not of the same kind. The school seems to have been opened on a large scale by the Goncourt brothers and Zola, with Huysmans and Maupassant following in their paths, all descendants of Flaubert, the Realist. From France Naturalism spread to England and to America.

During the 1890's in America, Stephen Crane and Frank Norris were Naturalist. Howells incorporated a kind of gentility and idealism amid the social and economic turmoil of the growing industrial country. Others such as Dreiser, Anderson, Masters, O'Neill, London, Hemingway, Sandburg, and Faulkner add personal touches, all of which are more representative of our

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<sup>24</sup>Note: this is the position of Balzac stated by Mrs. Colum, op. cit., p. 156

<sup>25</sup>Thrall and Hibbard, p. 267f.

modern social problems.

In this "Introduction" the purpose of this paper was set forth. Then, "Realism" and "Naturalism" were defined, their subject-matter, purpose, method, and other distinguishing notes were enlarged upon. Finally, the origins of these two literary movements were traced to England and to the United States.

## CHAPTER I

### THE REALISTIC SETTING IN THE BOROUGH

The aim of this chapter is to commence the study concerning the characteristics of Realism in the Borough, with reference to the setting with which George Crabbe invested the poem. First, however, the life of Crabbe will be sketched briefly together with some general observations on the period in which he lived, in order to form a background for his literary work. Then, the setting will be examined with its physical surroundings and types of people suitable to the Realist.

George Crabbe was born, December 24, 1754, in a small eastern coast-town of England, Aldeburgh, where his father toiled as a collector of salt-dues to keep his indigent family in food and clothing. The young George demonstrated a capacity for mathematics which was largely cultivated by self schooling. Set apart from the rest as a student in the family, he was allowed to cultivate his interest in botany and also in zoology as well as a country lad might. He was apprenticed to a doctor near Bury St. Edmund, afterwards to a surgeon in Woodbridge. Both of these beginnings proving inadequate, he managed to go off to London to study medicine, but the few pounds he had brought with him were soon consumed. With them also went his desire to follow the profession he had none too wisely chosen. He now turned desperately towards literature with the hope that he could thereby support himself in the large city. Fortune did not favor him; consequently, he shifted about until Edmund Burke answered his frantic pleas for assistance by pecuniary advancement and considerable encouragement in the criticism of his

work. He accepted Burke's suggestion to embrace Orders, and only after this did he commence to enjoy the leisure that was so necessary to his life as a poet. He received an appointment to his native town in Suffolk and later to the chaplaincy of the Duke of Rutland.<sup>1</sup>

The Borough was not published until 1810, but between the time of Crabbe's birth and the release of the poem, the seeds of many industrial and social changes were being sown about him. It was the time of the Great Industrial Revolution. Spinning machinery had been invented in 1764; Watt's steam engine in 1765, and the factory system was put into practice at this time. There was need, but not so much now as later, for factory laws to regulate the hours of work; for reform acts to improve self-government; for education acts to teach the young; for poor laws to constrain the rich; for pension acts to provide for the poor.<sup>2</sup> The American Declaration of Independence in 1776, the acknowledgment of it in 1783, the French Revolution in 1789, and the Reign of Terror in 1793, all tended to crystallize in the minds of the people the new notion that "liberte, egalite, fraternite" were possible for them. Thus, contrary to the individualistic spirit of Romanticism, more of a tendency towards altruism crept in. This was exemplified by Charles Dickens later in championing the cause of helpless school children and in manifesting the horrors of poverty-stricken neighborhoods in London.<sup>3</sup>

As contemporaries of Crabbe there were men whose doctrines have had a

<sup>1</sup>N.B.; these facts are condensed from The Poetical Works of the Rev. George Crabbe, with His Letters and Journals, and His Life by His Son (J. Murray, London, 1834), I.

<sup>2</sup>Laurie Magnus, English Literature in the Nineteenth Century (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1909), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>Henry D. Traill, "Social England" (Cassell and Co., Ltd., London, 1902), VI (for social and economic conditions.)

wide influence. Malthus (1746-1834) declared that the population tends to increase faster than the means of subsistence. Jeremy Bentham (1784-1832) developed a philosophy that offered happiness as the prime object of our existence, measured the morality of our actions by their effectiveness in securing happiness, and proclaimed the false theory of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. James Mill (1773-1836) measured morality by mere utility. These notions represent in some way the search for truth that continued during the intellectual ferment of the Industrial Revolution.

Before Crabbe went to London at the age of twenty-six, he had become familiar with the hard facts of life in a selfish, insignificant seacoast borough where misery was companion to want and men paid small heed to the revolutionary cry for emancipation. The difficult life of his father and of the other good men in his sluggish surroundings left a vivid impression upon him and induced him to do something about it. However, he never completely separated himself from these surroundings, for he had always cherished in his thoughts graphic pictures of the scenes of his childhood and youth. He seems rather to have chosen to sing the plaintive chant of the poor, suffering, disillusioned people of small-town life. It appears strange that the large popular movements, the Napoleonic Wars, the political ties of England with a new colony never figure in his poems; but that is characteristic of his reaction to his environment. All his literary life he spent in the country and was a part of its atmosphere, although a censoring one.<sup>4</sup>

The Borough, published in 1810, is a poem over ten thousand lines in length, written in Popeian couplets. There are twenty-four sections called

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<sup>4</sup>Lang, p. 47.

"Letters." In these sections all of the life of this small English borough is classified. Included among the headings of these Letters are topics, such as: religion and its ministers; the professions, trades; politics; prisons; schools; clubs; amusements; inns; the almshouse and its inhabitants; poor people of the borough. The characters and situations developed in the various Letters form no connected story, save for several Letters, of which four are given over exclusively to the poor and three to the inhabitants of the almshouse. Each Letter merits a title and is intended to represent some phase of borough life.

Since Crabbe had lived the life of lowly, country-town people and had experienced the impoverished condition of the middle and lower class in London, he could go back to the country and voice a protest to the squalor, the filth, wrongdoing -- the pitiable existence of the many, the easy life of the few--in the small towns and boroughs of the kingdom. He would do his part to make his fellowmen mindful of their duty to the unfortunate. He would turn his efforts away from London with its higher class and would unshamefacedly manifest the actual state of social conditions, just as they were in all their trueness to life in the borough. "Realism," as a literary term, was unknown to Crabbe, but he was a Realist, nevertheless, in declaring his scheme thus:

By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,  
As truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.  
("Village," I, ll. 53-54)

He chose no pastoral scenes such as the classicists painted after the model of Theocritus. Crabbe wanted no high flights of the imagination because he was a hardheaded man in whom imagination and intellect were welded together,

the latter exercising by far the dominion.

Crabbe did not choose to present Londoners; suave, leisurely men and women of Thackeray; city vagabonds, outcasts, and merchants of Dickens. In the Borough there are fishermen and their wives who mended the moldy nets; sailors and those who reaped the wildwind after some vessel had been stranded on their shore; the quays with small boats; shapeless streets that echoed to the rumble of rickety carts; all kinds of religious sects that managed to procure some following; small businesses whose workers and proprietors spent themselves during the day and then went off to amusements of cards, drinking, and theater plays in the evening; the professions of medicine and of law whose servants practiced quackery and unscrupulous cunning. There are social clubs where literary conversation was prevented by feasting and card games. Various inns exist, ranging from high class to those of very low repute. One of the average inns is Realistically described by Crabbe. The use of words like "soiled," "broken sconce," "mirror cracked" is to be noted.

In those you pass'd, where former splendour reign'd,  
 You saw the carpets torn, the paper stain'd;  
 Squares of discordant glass in windows fix'd,  
 And paper oil'd in many a space betwixt;  
 A soil'd and broken sconce, a morrhor crack'd,  
 With table underpropp'd, and chairs new back'd;  
 A marble side-slab with ten thousand stains,  
 And all an ancient Tavern's poor remains.

(Borough, XI, ll. 95-102)



There is in "Letter XIII" the almshouse which the philanthropic merchant had built for old men and women who had struggled and failed in life. After his death one of the trustees, Sir Denys Brand, vulgar and ostentatious as the founder had been modest and humble, threw open the doors to persons of shady antecedents on the ground that they at least, had been conspicuous in their day. This is the almshouse that has been attacked because of its policy of herding in, regardless of diversity of character, suffering men and women under the care of some as bad as the wrecks in it.<sup>5</sup>

Such people, their environment, and their daily work and problems form the setting for Crabbe. True, Wordsworth adopted lowly people for his themes, but the background was lighted in several different ways. Wordsworth was a Romanticist whose flights into imaginative heights far outstrip those of Crabbe, who sought only a representation:

This let me hope, that when in public view  
I bring my Pictures, men may feel them true:  
"This is a likeness," may they all declare,  
"And I have seen him, but I know not where."  
(Borough, XXIV, ll. 445-48)

Besides, Crabbe lacks the ability to generalize and to arrive at the universal which has more literary appeal. Strang calls attention to this.

The attitude of Crabbe and Wordsworth towards rustic or rather humble life causes more difficulty. Both take an interest in the lives of the poor; both look upon them as men, rather than as poor men. After that there is divergence: Wordsworth's interest is poetic and forms part of his grand view of man, nature, and society -- 'this

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<sup>5</sup>Laura J. Wylie, Social Studies in English Literature (Vassar Semi-centennial Series, Vassar College, New York, 1916), p. 99.

sanctity of nature given to man. Crabbe has no grand views; his interest is scientific and is centered in the mind of the man;<sup>6</sup>

It is with this scientific handling of his material that Crabbe tends to abandon any higher reaches of a purer poetic art and to turn the spotlight of the penetrating rays of the Realist upon the most minute of details. He was a keen observer and could always remember small details while engaged with but a portion of a large setting.<sup>7</sup> This characteristic has created a similarity to the type of painting practiced by the Dutch painters.<sup>8</sup>

Crabbe was able to create a scene in nature with the same emphasis upon detail. George E. Woodberry, in comparing Crabbe with Robert Burns touches upon Crabbe's Realism in description:

A description of life is of course far inferior to an utterance of it, such as was given to us by Burns who dealt with the life of the poor so much more powerfully than Crabbe; and as a realistic description has less poetic value than an imaginative one, such as was given to us by Wordsworth at his best. Crabbe's description is perhaps the most nakedly realistic of any in English poetry, but it is an uncommonly good one. Realism has a narrow compass, and Crabbe's powers were confined strictly within it; but he had the best virtues of a realist. His physical vision--his sight of what presents itself to the eye was almost perfect; he saw every object, and he saw it as it was.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>William Strang, George Crabbe (The Quain Essay), (Hodder and Sloughton, London, 1913), p. 88.

<sup>7</sup>George Crabbe, op. cit., Edinburgh edition, "Life of Crabbe," [n.n.], xii.

<sup>8</sup>Leigh Hunt, The Feast of the Poets (Gall, Curtis, and Fenner, London, 1815), p. 47f.; also, Rene Huchon, George Crabbe and His Times, 1754-1832, translated by Frederick Clarke, (J. Murray, London, 1907), p. 259.

<sup>9</sup>George E. Woodberry, Makers of Literature (Macmillan Co., New York, 1909), p. 98.

Maurice Baring<sup>10</sup> who apparently relished the poet defended Crabbe from bitter criticism of his Realism and felt that Crabbe is unsurpassed in descriptions of nature, although he admits a lack of felicity of diction.

Crabbe brought some of the most unusual objects in nature to our attention: "As a painter of English scenery, Crabbe is as original as in character sketching. His landscapes are peculiarly striking and he invests even sterile marshes and barren sands with interest."<sup>11</sup> This accuracy of minute detail might be explained by the poet's liking for zoology, geology, and botany because he frequently analyzes flowers, weeds, sea, and landscape.<sup>12</sup>

But this stressing of details and probing into minutiae, blinded Crabbe to many of the finer beauties of nature-pictures. He failed to take in the landscape as a whole but absorbed it only as a mosaic of separate objects; he seldom saw the beauty of these single items; he did little but catalogue things before him, and missed the general effects of beauty or of grandeur.<sup>13</sup> His physical vision or External Realism was quite clear and exact, in fact, almost statistical, so that as a result his pictures have occasionally figures that are carelessly and clumsily grouped. The total effect, then, lacks depth and roundness.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, his method has been called

<sup>10</sup>Maurice Baring, Punch and Judy and Other Essays (William Heineman Ltd., London, 1924), p. 222.

<sup>11</sup>David Patrick, editor, Chamber's Cyclopedia of English Literature, revised edition, (Lippincott Co., 1902), I, p. 695.

<sup>12</sup>J. Churton Collins, "The Poetry of Crabbe," Fortnightly Review, LXXXVIII (September 2, 1907), p. 589.

<sup>13</sup>Woodberry, p. 99.

<sup>14</sup>"Art. I. The Borough; a Poem. In Twenty-four Letters," Quarterly Review, IV (November, 1810), p. 281.

photographic.

From the previous treatment it should be evident that Crabbe chose lowly people in their familiar atmosphere. In his attempt to be matter-of-fact and to present life as it really is, he often denies them the pleasant things of life also. So, the moonlight reflects on mud:

What time the moon arising shows the mud,  
A shining border to the silver flood:  
(Borough, IX, ll. 162-63)

The poor man looks from his dingy room

Where through his single light, he may regard  
The various business of a common yeard,  
Bounded by backs of buildings form'd of clay,  
By stables, sties, and coops, et caetera.  
(Borough, IX, ll. 20-23)

Such words as, "sinks," "sewers," "heaps," "stagnant," "polluted," "sickley scent," "putrefying mass," are to be especially observed in the following

Yet now neglected, more offend the eye,  
By gloom and ruin, than the cottage by:  
Places like these the noblest town endures,  
The gayest palace has its sinks and sewers.  
Here is no pavement, no inviting shop,  
.....  
But plashy puddles stand along the way,  
.....  
And doorside heaps afford their dubious aid,  
.....  
Here our reformers come not; none object  
To paths polluted, or upbraid neglect;  
None care that ashy heaps at doors are cast,  
That coal-dust flies along the blinding blast:  
None heed the stagnant pools on either side,  
Where new-launched ships of infant-sailors ride:  
.....  
Where the strong mallow strikes her slimy root,  
Here the dull nightshade hangs her deadly fruit:  
On hills of dust the henbane's faded green,  
And pencil'd flower of sickly scent is seen;  
At the wall's base the fiery nettle springs,  
With fruit globse and fierce with poison'd stings;  
.....

In every chink delights the fern to grow,  
 With glossy leaf and tawny bloom below;  
 These, with their sea-weeds, rolling up and down,  
 Form the contracted Flora of the town.

Say, wilt thou more of scenes so sordid know?  
 Then will I lead thee down the duty row;  
 By the warm alley and the long close lane, --  
 There mark the fractur'd door and paper'd pane,  
 Where flags the noon-tide air, and, as we pass,  
 We fear to breathe the putrefying mass:

(Borough, XVIII, ll. 251ff.)

These selections in the Borough are representative of the many Realistic ones which appear.

Crabbe's use of vulgar, sordid details of a moral nature will be considered later in the chapter on attitude. What, however, is to be said of his Realism which indulges in physical dirt so offensive to poets of his day? Leigh Hunt felt that his taste was awry: "He is . . . singularly deficient in taste, his familiarity continually bordering on the vulgar, and his seriousness on the morbid and shocking."<sup>15</sup> Varley Lang denies this, saying that restraint was used, Crabbe not revelling in vulgarity and unpleasantness for its own sake.<sup>16</sup> Lang offers the "stream" in the "General Description" of the Borough in support of his contention pointing out that the object of Crabbe is the contrast to the pastoral treatment of the "purling" stream. This may be considered a definite enough purpose, but at Crabbe's time few would deny that he showed a lack of feeling for the things which had added their beauties to poetry for ages. He apparently had little if any desire to select those objects Shelley and Keats found beauty in. His selection left much to be desired, judged by their standards. Lang, however,

<sup>15</sup>Hunt, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup>Lang, p. 58.

is writing long after Realism has burst its bonds and has become recognized as a popular form of literary expression. Today, it seems rather a question of "de gustibus non est disputandum" in the sense that neither he who finds it fitting, nor he who disagrees should be branded with a literary "Anathema sit!"

Just as no stage scene is complete without the blending of colors of various shades to create the proper atmosphere, so Crabbe's descriptions are not completely understood without reference to the Realistic tone of his setting.

At first, it may seem that the only color suitable to the Realist is one that invites the spirit of darkness, a deep red in which all the evil genies and shades of the underworld prowl and lurk about, working their miseries upon the hero and the heroine. Realism tends to exaggerate dark lines. It fashions a spirit of hopeless gloom, shadowy mystery, at times even of despair when it is exaggerated. But the impression can be modified just as stage lights can modify a scene. Realism can put off its dusky robes for a time to sport about in the sunshine. In fact, some Realists are tolerant of the bright light and spend a considerable amount of their time absorbing and reflecting it in their work. It is with the procedure of these moderate realists that Crabbe spends much of his time, indulging often enough in satire and genial humor, which he thoroughly enjoys.

Definitely, Crabbe's Physical Realism does not have the deep red lights of an abysmal despair for mankind. There is a tone, nevertheless, frequently recurring in the Borough, which mirrors the eery light of a spirit of disillusion, of foreboding, of fear, of decay in life, not of youth and

buoyancy and hope. It is the feeling found in Old English verse that the end of joy is always woe; that men and things are not what they seem or what the fancy of the sentimental and romantic temper has made them seem to be. It reflects the fleeting, will-of-the-wisp nature of pleasure and joy, and the vanity of human wishes which shows that what began as joy and pleasure may turn out as woe.<sup>17</sup>

Atmosphere lends itself favorably to promote disillusion. Crabbe's picture with its varying Realistic shades and tones suggests discouragement and disappointment.

Disillusion comes from expecting too much from people or from life. Crabbe himself went through a bitter schooling in this respect both at home and later in London where he had spent his substance in pursuit of his literary career. Disillusion springs from the conviction that whether they are poor, frugal, rich, or lavish, people cannot escape the inevitable lot of creatures who are all prone to error and victims of misery. Crabbe had some of this in his blood, and he realized clearly enough that poetry, the medium through which he hoped to reach his disciples, was in a slump at the time he wrote.<sup>18</sup> The thought that, after having spent a lifetime in eager pursuit of pleasure's ever receding form, we find that we are no longer capable of enjoyment, is disillusion. A weary traveller experienced this as he watched some poor but gay villagers.

Lo! where on that huge anchor sadly leans  
That sick tall figure, lost in other scenes;  
He late from India's clime impatient sail'd

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-9.

There, as his fortune grew, his spirits fail'd;  
 For each delight, in search of wealth he went,  
 For ease alone, the wealth acquired in spent--  
 And spent in vain; enrich'd aggrieved, he sees  
 The envied poor possess'd of joy and ease:  
 And now he flies from place to place, to gain  
 Strength for enjoyment, and still flies in vain:  
 Mark! with what sadness, of that pleasant crew,  
 Boist'rous in mirth, he takes a transient view;  
 And fixing then his eye upon the sea,  
 Thinks what has been and what must shortly be:  
 Is it not strange that man should health destroy,  
 For joys that come when he is dead to joy?

(Borough, IX, ll. 61-78)

Life thus becomes something of a strange tragedy in which the actors assume various attitudes of envious longing. Each desires an imaginary happiness which the other possessing envies in him, in turn, so that each thinks the other happy and both are accordingly deluded. A typical example of this is the following:

Along the wall, returning from the town,  
 The weary rustic homeward wanders down:  
 Who stops and gazes at such joyous crew,  
 And feels his envy rising at the view;  
 He the light speech and laugh indignant hears,  
 And feels more press'd by want, more vex'd by fears.

Ah! go in peace, good fellow, to thine home,  
 Nor fancy these escape the general doom:  
 Gay as they seem, be sure with them are hearts  
 With sorrow tried; there's sadness in their parts:  
 If thou couldst see them when they think alone,  
 Mirth, music, friends, and these amusements gone;  
 Couldst thou discover every secret ill  
 That pains their spirit, or resists their will;  
 Couldst thou behold forsaken Love's distress,  
 Or envy's pang at glory and success,  
 Or beauty conscious of the spoils of Time,  
 Or guilt alarm'd when memory shows the crime;  
 All that gives sorrow, terror, grief, and gloom;  
 Content would cheer thee trudging to thine home.

(Borough, IX, ll. 173-92)

Because of the recurrence of this theme of disillusion, Huchon has said of



it: "It is the mainspring of his tragic stories."<sup>19</sup>

It is easy to understand how such a spirit is likely to become very gloomy. Gloom and pessimism pour from the pen of Crabbe but not in the torrents which Hazlitt, who found little of any real worth in the poet, would have the reader believe: "There are here no ornaments, no flights of fancy, no illusions of sentiment, no tinsel of words. His song is one sad reality, one unraised, unvaried note of unavailing woe."<sup>20</sup> After commenting on the gloomy surroundings of a certain Peter, who will be considered in a later chapter, Hazlitt vents his indignation in the following:

Indeed the whole of Mr. Crabbe's Borough from which the above passage is taken, is done so to the life, that it seems almost like some sea-monster, crawled out of the neighboring slime, and harboring a breed of strange vermin, with a strong local scent of tar and bulge-water.<sup>21</sup>

Hazlitt thus relieves himself of a grudge he has against a "sickly, a querulous, a uniformly dissatisfied poet" who, he things, chose subjects connected with the country only to take the charm out of them and to dispel the illusion, glory, dream of the Theocritan type.<sup>22</sup> But he is not finished yet. He believes that Crabbe was "planted" in some small curacy for life and took revenge by turning out obnoxious verse, having himself barred the possibility of good and having cancelled hope or even wishing for it as a

<sup>19</sup>Huohon, p. 341.

<sup>20</sup>William Hazlitt, Lectures on English Poets--The Spirit of the Age, Every-Man's Library Series, Ernest Rhys, editor, (J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., London, 1939), p. 330.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 334.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 332.

weakness.<sup>23</sup>

Crabbe is not so disagreeable as that. On many pages there is sunshine and laughter, even if in the end one awakens to the realization that there is an overcast sky of gray clouds above him. Satire and humor abound in his verses, it is true, revealing something parsonical and reproofing in the treatment of background, as will be more evident from a consideration of his attitude. Far more accurate does it seem to say that he painted some gloomy scenes of life, his pathos and tenderness being in the end "linked to something harsh, startling, or humiliating, to disappointed hopes or unavailing sorrow."<sup>24</sup> Our total impression of his setting approaches more the observation of Brooke: "Even when the gentler scenery enters into his verse, the harshness of the first impression modulates the softness into roughness; and the spirit of the poet is too often the spirit of the mist, the barren, thorny land, and the storm-tossed sea, the misery and melancholy of it all."<sup>25</sup>

This chapter, the first in a series of three in which certain characteristics of Realism are being investigated, opened with a consideration of Crabbe's life as a background for the study of Realistic setting in the Borough. Crabbe grew up in a period of social, industrial, and political change. He was close to the poor people of the countryside, knew their problems, understood their ambitions, and sympathized with their failings.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>24</sup>Chamber's Cyclopedia of English Literature, I, p. 695.

<sup>25</sup>Stopford A. Brooke, Naturalism in English Poetry (Dutton, and Co., New York, 1920), p. 91.

That is why he chose humble persons whom he hoped to help by revealing their plight.

These lowly people, their simple pleasures, their labors and hardships in village life furnish agreeable material for the Realistic writer, who brushes aside all pomp in order, as he says, to arrive at truth. In his search for "trueness to life," Crabbe happens upon amusing situations in business; abuses in the professions, in religion, and in social conditions of the poor. He visits their dirty streets and houses, sufficient proof of the misery in which they live. These people and their humble surroundings are the subject-matter of the Realistic setting of the Borough.

Much of the effect of Realism lies in the method of treating humble people and lowly surroundings. The Romanticists dealt with the same persons and environs that Crabbe used, but they laid emphasis upon fancy and imagination. Crabbe followed his scientific propensity to gather facts and to emphasize details. Thus, his Physical Realism was likely to be linked with a very minute scrutiny of objects. Having this tendency he was apt to indulge in unpleasant details because he entertained a dislike for the customary method of poetic treatment.

A scene teeming with toiling men and women who are unhappy promotes disillusion, foreboding, fear of the future. Crabbe has a spirit of disillusionment in his setting, but neither it nor the atmosphere of gloom is so depressing that it does not give way to lighter moods upon occasion.

## CHAPTER II

### THE REALISTIC CHARACTERIZATION IN THE BOROUGH

It requires but little study of Crabbe to discover that he is not a great poet. He was never ranked among great poets of his age, and it is easy to understand why after reading a few dozens of his jingling couplets. But that he possessed something which could enkindle fires in fellow poets cannot be denied. Sir Walter Scott was soothed in his last hours by Crabbe. Wordsworth proclaimed that his poetry would last as long as anything ever offered in verse. Byron called him first among living poets of his day. Gifford, Wilson, Jeffrey, Rogers, all praised him in exaggerated terms. Cardinal Newman experienced renewed joy from reading Crabbe again after thirty years. The Cardinal explained that this tribute answered in part to the "accidental definition of a classic." Tennyson liked him also.<sup>1</sup> Of course, opposite the name of each enthusiast those of several unfavorable critics can be placed, for time has shown that Crabbe's poetry, as a whole, does not compare with the work of the names mentioned above. The point, however, is that there are some very good qualities in Crabbe's work.

Possibly, the reason for his popularity, such as it was, lies in the poet's ability to characterize well. According to Lang, the evolution of Crabbe's development of character has been long overlooked or denied. He believes that in either case a mistake has been made, and he takes pains to show that improvement in characterization was constant throughout Crabbe's

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Collins, p. 577.

literary work, reaching its peak in the Posthumous Tales. Lang concludes that the chief development of Crabbe was in his characterization.<sup>2</sup> If this is true, it is likely that Crabbe's admirers appreciated his characterization.

Proceeding upon the assumption that Crabbe's renown as a poet rests upon his character sketches, one is interested in Crabbe's own character as a fount of experience from which he draws. Already, reference has been made to his environment. Any person who has lived a narrow life confined within a small village in which ambitions spring up, falter, and then die within its own boundaries, knows that he cannot escape such an influence. The miserable status of the poor in their hovels, the squalor and dirt which stifle noble ideals in their simple minds, eat into the character of sensitive souls and shape them either for better or for worse. In the case of Crabbe, there was a struggle to rid himself of the environment which he hated. And yet, when finally free of it and comparatively well-to-do, he commenced relating in the Borough the lives of those poor people among whom he had lived.

Another significant factor in the character of Crabbe himself is that he was of a scientific turn of mind. His nature was not that of the truly imaginative poet. He had been an enthusiast in botany and in medical science; he had tinkered in both fields with some degree of skill, though this was rather slight in medicine. At mathematics he was the pride of his father who had passed on to him his own aptitude, which was sufficient to mark the father as a scholar and to win for him the position of tax collector in

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<sup>2</sup>Lang, pp. 148-51.

Aldeburgh. This tendency to be more realistic than imaginative impelled him to trace causes and effects in the situations he created. In addition, coupled with a scientific bent was his craving to have the exigencies of the moral law satisfied. In this respect, he approached some of the didactic poets of the Classical Period.

In an investigation of the characters of the Borough, various viewpoints will have to be considered; that of the characters themselves as simple or complex subjects; the evidences of good characterization; elevating effect and depressing effect of these diverse people upon the reader. In this type of consideration the same characters serve as examples in more than one classification since there are different viewpoints. Further, it is to be borne in mind that considerable freedom of choice may be had in relegating certain characters to one division, such as that of simple characters or complex one, rather than to another. It is believed that the various characters which have been placed in certain divisions and classifications are sufficiently explained so as to justify their classification and reveal their Realistic nature to best advantage.

Among simple characters are those ordinary townspeople whom Crabbe knew intimately from boyhood. He created them in their everyday joys and sorrows, their problems of family squabbles, love affairs, their aspirations which, being feeble, never mature sufficiently to demand heroic action.

These simple characters include men of civic distinction and those without renown in community life. The former group contains the professional men who have preserved themselves from serious social and moral corruption.

First in dignity in the Borough may be placed the chief official, the

Mayor of Aldeburgh. This man from his earliest days was a simple fisherman,  
and

He lived, nor dream'd of Corporation-Doles;  
But toiling saved, and saving, never ceased  
Till he had box'd up twelvescore pounds at least;  
He knew not money's power, but judged it best  
Safe in his trunk to let his treasure rest;<sup>3</sup>  
(Borough, V, ll. 340-44)

Anxiety over his treasure prompted him to confide in a friend who revealed  
to him the practice of lending to someone who would not only guard his money  
for him but would pay him for the use of it. Daniel, the honest fisherman,  
misunderstands the process of lending money for interest, naively saying:

"What good in that?" quoth Daniel, "for 'tis plain,  
If part I take, there can but part remain:"  
"What! you, my friend, so skill'd in gainful things,  
Have you to learn what Interest money brings?"  
"Not so," said Daniel, "Perfectly I know,  
He's the most interest who has most to show."  
.....  
..... What, Daniel, art thou dumb?"  
For much amazed was that good man. --"Indeed!"  
Said he with gladd'ning eye, "will money breed?  
How have I lived? I grieve, with all my heart,  
Five pounds for every hundred will he give?  
And then the hundred? -- I begin to live."--  
(Borough, V, ll. 357-72)

This started the fisherman's amassing a great fortune which brought him  
finally the highest dignity in the Borough.

Poverty in the Borough did not fail to claim attention. One of the  
wealthy merchants had all his life generously given in secret to the poor.  
At the age of seventy, he built an almshouse for those decent freemen who  
had pledged themselves to life according to a set of rules drawn up by the  
flunders. Six guardians administered the government of the almshouse, meet-  
ing to elect another member upon the death of anyone of the six. Sir Denys

Brand was elected in this way.

And he, Sir Denys, was in heart a king:  
 Erect in person and so firm in soul,  
 Fortune he seem'd to govern and control:  
 Generous as he who gives his all away,  
 Prudent as one who toils for weekly pay;  
 In him all merits were decreed to meet,  
 Sincere though cautious, frank and yet discreet,  
 Just all his dealings, faithful every word,  
 His passions' master, and his temper's lord.

(Borough, XIII, ll. 105-13)

Such was the public record which told the character of this benefactor.

But Crabbe never allows the dead to rest if that means concealing truth.

This Sir Denys has other qualities less amiable, for Crabbe reveals:

Let us a mortal as he was behold,  
 And see the dross adhering to the gold;  
 (Borough, XIII, ll. 128-29)

Denys was a man of consummate pride in his devotion to the poor. He gave much of what he had, but he avoided the simple acts of generosity that drew no public attention.

His was a public bounty vast and grand,  
 'Twas not in him to work with viewless hand;  
 (Borough, XIII, ll. 146-47)

So, he built the public jail where even an offender could not rest without obligations to Sir Denys. For these benefits he merited not even a sigh from widows upon his death because everyone knew his motive. All realized that he customarily upbraided his servants for their swinishness while

He daily took but one half hour to dine,  
 On one poor dish and some three sips of wine;  
 (Borough, XIII, ll. 183-84)

With something of the vanity of King Lear's "When I do stare, see how the subject quakes," he had hired an urchin to serve him because the boy,



frightened at the grandeur of Sir Denys, used to run away and hide, having asked on one occasion:

Oh! Mister Jacob, when you wait on him,  
Do you not quake and tremble every limb?"  
(Borough, XIII, ll. 223-24)

Another simple character of the Borough was the Vicar whose

Constant care was, no man to offend;  
.....  
He ever aim'd to please; and to offend  
Was ever cautious; for he sought a friend;  
.....  
Mild were his doctrines, and not one discourse  
But gain'd in softness what it lost in force:  
Kind his opinions; he would not receive  
An ill report, nor evil act believe;  
.....  
Habit with him was all the test of truth;  
"It must be right: I've done it from my youth."  
Questions he answer'd in as brief a way:  
"It must be wrong -- it was of yesterday."  
(Borough, III, ll. 16ff.)

This man's chief, ruling passion, as Crabbe calls it, was "fear." His kind disposition won a way for him with the mother more than with the girl he wooed, and the latter finally scorned his attention because of dalliance and inactivity.

She with her widow'd Mother, heard him speak.  
And sought awhile to find what he would seek:  
Smiling he came, he smiled when he withdrew,  
And paid the same attention to the two;  
Meeting and parting without joy or pain,  
He seem'd to come that he might go again.  
(Borough, III, ll. 25-30)

Without any embarrassment he turned his affections towards groups of older women and frequently greeted them with compliments, such as how they "Like flowers were sweet, and must like flowers decay." All the plain people esteemed him, but Crabbe finished the account of his character with a touch of

ridicule:

No one so old has left this world of sin,  
 More like the being that he enter'd in.  
 (Borough, III, ll. 164-65)

The Curate of the Borough was a diffident scholar whose only gift of inheritance had been his education in the ministry. With this he entered upon his work, married, and reared a large family of four girls and five boys. He reluctantly moved his family to the seaside because his wife was sickly. There, in misery he and his suffering children lived with the sick mother, their support being whatever he could secure from the boys and girls whom he took to his hut for instruction. He tried to write; publishers feared his work would not sell. He himself lacked the initiative to overcome this diffidence.

The hope of fame may in his heart have place,  
 But he has dread and horror of disgrace;  
 Nor has he that confiding, easy way,  
 That might his learning and himself display;  
 But to his work he from the world retreats,  
 And frets and glories o'er the favorite sheets.  
 (Borough, III, ll. 110-15)

Here is a character that cannot rise from failure. The Realistic note of failure and misfortune, however, is softened somewhat by the moralistic attitude shown in the final soliloquy of this character.

These simple men are different by profession from the usual type of people Crabbe treats of, in whom ordinary Realistic tendencies are found. This by no means eliminates them from the discussion of Realism. In each of these characters who are representative of many more there are the customary marks of the Realistic temperament: predominance of fact over imagination and reason; humble surroundings; a worldly outlook which rivets

man to the things about him; truth in its cold reality, be that misery or joy; a note of pessimism and despair which suggests the gloomy side of life. When the contented fisherman learned the potentiality of money, he threw everything into the battle to amass wealth and power, making himself ridiculous in the accomplishment of it. Sir Denys wanted nothing more in life than public recognition for his exalted position and his generous benefactions, thus stifling all noble qualities of soul. The Vicar truly draws away from the class of Realistic men, but Crabbe was poking fun Realistically at this sort of spineless, dallying creature and at others whom he scornfully branded, "Ye Lilies male!" (Borough, III, l. 69). A few more spurts of imagination and dreams of conquest might have urged the Curate on to publication and saved him from the unfortunate state into which he fell.

These simple or easily understandable characters of the Borough thus far considered, have been men who should have occupied an exalted position in village life. Among those who are ordinary people, first are the Actors.

The "veteran dame," who in her old age follows the promptings of her vanity, thinks that she can play any youthful part. She reveals herself in the following:

Me thinks 'tis pitiful to see her try  
 For strength of arms and energy of eye;  
 With vigour lost, and spirits worn away,  
 Her pomp and pride she labours to display;  
 And when awhile she's tried her part to act,  
 To find her thoughts arrested by some fact;  
 When struggles more and more severe are seen,  
 In the plain actress than the Danish queen, --  
 At length she feels her part, she finds, delight,  
 And fancies all the plaudits of the night;  
 Old as she is, she smiles at every speech,

And thinks no youthful part beyond her reach  
 (Borough, XII, ll. 105-16)

Cynthia, the young singer of the troop, had forsaken her position with a milliner because she found it more delightful to commit to memory the lines of a gentle damsel than to ply her thread and needle. Still, she was ill-equipped by nature for the carefree life of actors of the day:

But Cynthia's soul was soft, her wishes strong,  
 Her judgment weak, and her conclusions wrong;  
 (Borough, XII, ll. 131-32)

Being so deficient, naturally she succumbed to the evils that beset her. The hero of the company, a smooth-tongued deceiver, won her confidence and then left her in disgrace, the scandal of the company.

Nor ring nor licence needed souls so fond,  
 Alfonso's passion was his Cynthia's bond;  
 And thus the simple girl, to shame betray'd,  
 Sinks to the grave forsaken and dismay'd.  
 (Borough, XII, ll. 141-44)

Abused, broken, despised, she withered into a state of consumption. The deterioration of both these actresses strikes a note of tragic Realism found in some of Crabbe's characterizations.

Peter Nottage, a dutiful, honest bricklayer, was called one day to mend the players' scenes. Once there, he was told to come to see them play at night. At first, this seemed "folly, nonsense, idle stuff," but being free amusement night after night, it grew upon him until he felt that he simply had to join their company. Against the counsel of his wife and friends, he went off with them, driven on by a longing to know how it must feel to "be a king."

Poor Peter thus by easy steps became  
 A dreaming candidate for scenic fame,

And after years consumed, infirm and poor,  
 He sits and takes the tickets at the door.  
 (Borough, XII, ll. 179-82)

Poor Peter thus became the miserable dupe of a delusion which worked his own downfall.

Neddy was a popular dunce in his class at school. He could neither read nor write, but he had shrewdness enough to figure out the name "oxymel of squills" in a medical book and to concoct this as a remedy for ailing lungs. His boon companion supplied the "puffs" to make it sell. After great profits were realized from the worthless syrup, the accomplice died leaving all glory to the quack Neddy.

Now see him Doctor! yes, the idle fool,  
 The butt, the robber of the lads at school;  
 Who then knew nothing, nothing since acquired,  
 Became a doctor, honour'd and admired;  
 His dress, his frown, his dignity were such,  
 Some who had known him thought his knowledge much;  
 Nay, men of skill, of apprehension quick,  
 Spite of their knowledge, trusted him when sick;  
 Though he could neither reason, write, nor spell,  
 They yet had hope his trash would make them well;  
 And while they scorn'd his parts, they took his oxymel.  
 (Borough, VII, ll. 263-73)

For a tragedy of two young lovers there is the story of Juliet Hart and James Fletcher. Both had seen Shakespeare's play and thought it delightful to act the parts of these lovers, under the moon, with fervent pledges of an undying faith. It had not occurred to Juliet, it seems, to observe the formalities of marriage, and she became the mother of a child. Pity and fear of the "law" hounded James until he resolved to go to the girl. Her father had meanwhile become a cursing menace to his daughter. As James entered the house, Juliet's mother rose to meet him and appealed

to his sense of duty and manliness to marry the girl. Mr. Hart explained that the boy's solution was very simple. Then Juliet herself, revealing her own foolishness, entered her plea:

Had I been forward, skittish, or unkind,  
 Or to thy person or thy passion blind;  
 Had I refused, when 'twas thy part to pray,  
 Or put thee off with promise and delay;  
 Thou would'st in justice and in conscience fly,  
 Denying her who taught thee to deny;  
 But, James, with me thou hadst an easier task,  
 Bonds and conditions I forbore to ask;  
 I laid no traps for thee, no plots or plans,  
 Nor marriage named by licence or by banns;  
 Nor would I now the parson's aid employ,  
 But for this cause," -- and up she held her boy.  
 (Borough, XI, 11. 299-310)

Her appeal softened the lad who responded generously and planned a large respectable wedding. This is one of the few situations where the evildoers make a satisfactory attempt to mend the lives they have damaged, but the whole background up to this point is strongly colored by Realism.

Benbow, an inveterate sot of the village, went to the almshouse when his resources failed him. There he loved to tell the joys of his former life of licentiousness. He was the sort of fellow who thought that everybody enjoyed him and wished to benefit by his entertainment. One tale after another he tells of his low acquaintances. It is interesting to note in connection with Benbow that Crabbe offers an explanation for this type of character.

Benbow may be thought too low and despicable to be admitted here; but he is a borough-character, and however disgusting in some respects a picture may be, it will please some, and be tolerated by many, if it can boast that one merit of being a faithful likeness.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>N.B.: this is found in a footnote at the end of "Letter XVI."

Incidentally, this reintroduces the reader to Crabbe's purpose in his Realism.

These simple characters among the ordinary people of the Borough have the dark mantle of Fate, familiar to the Realist, spread over their lives. The actors were members of a class of people whose future rests upon their lucky stars. Peter Nottage joined this group because he was deluded into thinking that his happiness lay with them. Benbow embodied the spirit of effortless resistance to tavern life with all its dark avenues of low pleasures. Even Fate got the better of the young lovers until they restored their respectability by cloaking their iniquity with the rites of matrimony. If Fate did not claim them, at least their predicament lay squarely in the channel of the Realist's native environment.

For complex characters we can turn to those men and women whose actions are likely to be involved, intricate, or complicated in the mind of the reader. Complex characters can be subdivided into: psychological and individualistic. The complex characters of Crabbe's Borough that are individualistic are not characters whom we would point to as types any more than the simple characters are types. They are individualistic in the sense of being very distinct. In fact, whereas Whitman tends to create individuals who are somewhat universal in type, Crabbe's individualistic characters never seem to have the qualities which give them universality.

One of the characters of the Borough who stands out as a strong person is the unscrupulous attorney, Swallow.

By Law's dark by-ways he had stored his mind  
 With wicked knowledge, how to cheat mankind.  
 (Borough, VI, ll. 228-29)

The old fellow had hoped to put his son at an honest trade, but this failing, he used the son to stir up disputes which he could settle for his own benefit. His crafty plan was first to dine his client sumptuously before entering upon business.

His way to starve them was to make them eat,  
And drink oblivious draughts -- to his applause,  
It must be said he never starved a cause;  
(Borough, VI, ll. 237-38)

A warming cordial had its place in his scheme also:

But first the brandy and the chine were seen,  
And then the business came by starts between.  
(Borough, VI, ll. 246-47)

Aided by these devices, Swallow usually won title to the very property of his client that he was engaged to protect, and then his unfortunate victims screamed:

"Rogue!" "Villain!" "Scoundrel!" cried the losers all;  
He let them cry for what would that recall?  
(Borough, VI, ll. 254-55)

However, no sting of conscience hampered his movements; no fear of retaliation seized him because he knew that those who needed him would pay dearly. He unshamefacedly received all oncomers.

(For he'd a way that many judged polite,  
A cunning dog -- he'd fawn before he'd bite) --  
(Borough, VI, ll. 281-82)

So notorious was his character that years afterwards in the Borough:

Still we of Swallow as a monster speak,  
A hard bad man, who prey'd upon the weak.  
(Borough, VI, ll. 377-78)

If duplicity and treachery were virtues, Swallow was by far the holiest person in the Borough.



Another of the individualistic type of characters was Clelia, a gay young woman of the world. Enjoying numerous social graces, she added to the extent of her charms the ability to converse superficially about anything.

Novels and plays, with poems old and new,  
Were the books our nymph attended to;  
Yet from the press no treatise issued forth,  
But she would speak precisely of its worth.

She with the London stage familiar grew,  
And every actor's name and merit knew;  
She told how this or that their part mistook,  
And of the rival Romeos gave the look;

(Borough, XV, ll. 19-26)

Part of her success was due to an ease with which she could "work" both in and out of society.

Her place in life was rich and poor between,  
With those a favorite, and with these a queen;  
She could her parts assume, and condescend  
To friends more humble while an humble friend;  
And thus a welcome, lively guest could pass,  
Threading her pleasant way from class to class.

(Borough, XV, ll. 131-36)

Then one day a suitor, Lovelace by name, approached her with an equal amount of suavity and dexterity in the art of love.

Her thoughts of virtue were not all sublime,  
Nor virtuous all her thoughts; 'twas now her time  
To bait each hook, in every way to please,  
And the rich prize with dext'rous hand to seize.  
She had no virgin-terrors; she could stray  
In all love's maze, nor fear to lose her way;  
Nay, could go near the precipice, nor dread  
A failing caution or a giddy head;  
She'd fix her eyes upon the rearing flood,  
And dance upon the brink where danger stood.

(Borough, XV, ll. 72-81)

Lovelace won her although years later they parted; she successively trying to be a school teacher, to write a novel, to run a boarding-house. Finally, Sir Denys admitted her to the almshouse where she met the unfortunate Blaney

who became an appropriate companion:

Hour after hour they sit, and nothing hide  
 Of vices past; their follies are their pride;  
 What to the sober and the cool are crimes,  
 They boast -- exulting in those happy times;  
 The darkest deeds no indignation raise  
 The purest virtue never wins their praise  
 But still they on their ancient joys dilate,  
 Still with regret departed glories state,  
 And mourn their grievous fall, and curse their  
 rigorous fate.

(Borough, XV, ll. 208-18)

One must note the persistent pride in a character of this kind. Though wronged, defeated, and disgraced, she delighted in recalling and in recounting her former conquests and pleasurable life to a creature fallen as low as herself.

In marked contrast to this woman is Ellen Orford, the noblest character in the Borough. Her love affair precipitated for her a series of misfortunes which would have broken a less courageous character.

Then in my days of bloom of health, and youth,  
 One, much above me, vow'd his love and truth:  
 We often met, he dreading to be seen,  
 And much I question'd what such dread might mean;  
 Yet I believed him true; my simple heart  
 And undirected reason took his part.

(Borough, XX, ll. 146-51)

The nobleman had had his own gratification and was

Peevish when urged to think of vows so strong,  
 And angry when I spake of crime and wrong.  
 All this I felt, and still the sorrow grew,  
 Because I felt that I deserved it too,  
 And begg'd my infant stranger to forgive  
 The mother's shame, which in herself must live.

(Borough, XX, ll. 175-80)

Driven from home in shame, she boarded with her frail sister.

There barely fed --(what could I more request?)  
 My infant slumberer sleeping at my breast,  
 I from my window saw his blooming bride,  
 And my seducer smiling at her side;  
 Hope lived till then; I sank upon the floor,  
 (Borough, XX, ll. 183-87)

Ellen rallied her strength, however:

But Heav'n had mercy, and my need at length  
 Urged me to labor, and renew'd my strength.  
 I strove with patience as a sinner must,  
 Yet felt the opinion of the world unjust,  
 (Borough, XX, ll. 198-201)

The child of this relationship further heightened her anxiety because

Lovely my daughter, her face was fair,  
 But no expression ever brighten'd there;  
 I doubted long, and vainly strove to make  
 Some certain meaning of the words she spake;  
 But meaning there was none, and I survey'd  
 With dread the beauties of my idiot-maid.  
 (Borough, XX, ll. 212-17)

Fortune smiled temporarily upon Ellen, and reason bade her accept the proposal of marriage of a merchant. Five sons were born to her from this marriage, but strange doctrines of predestination influenced her husband.

His very nature changed; he now reviled  
 My former conduct, -- he reproached my child.  
 He talked of bastard slips, and cursed his bed,  
 And from our kindness to concealment fled;  
 (Borough, XX, ll. 245-48)

Upon her husband's death four sons were sent to the parish poor-house. Three of them Ellen followed to the grave; a fourth became the victim of a foul plot and as a result suffered capital punishment. Her eldest was drowned at sea. The following year, the idiot-maid died, and Ellen, bereft of parish aid, found subsistence in teaching school. This was only temporary relief because

A trial came, I will believe, a last;  
 I lost my sight, and my employment gone  
 Useless I live but to the day live on.  
 (Borough, XX, ll. 329-31)

Inured to suffering, Ellen responded very generously to painful sacrifices weighing upon her and confessed:

My senses fail not all; I speak, I pray;  
 By night my rest, my food I take by day;  
 And, as my mind looks cheerful to my end,  
 I love mankind, and call my GOD my friend.  
 (Borough, XX, ll. 334-37)

No other individual in the Borough shows so much character and resignation among the Realistic persons who animate the poem. Incidentally, it is worth remarking here that Crabbe's treatment of women characters is especially good.<sup>4</sup>

The three complex characters just considered as distinct individuals are representative of other persons in Crabbe's Borough, most of whom are striking individuals. These complex kinds of characters exhibit more conflict, more clash of human interests, which calls for greater response on the part of characters. In adjusting themselves to the changing fortunes about them, they pass through various stages of deterioration, disillusion and despair.

The reason why Crabbe's men and women are so individualistically drawn is the fact that the poet dealt with the psychology of human character. One aspect of this psychological probing into his men and women characters is revealed in the large number of cases in which the characters themselves

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Lang, p. 138.

bring about their own destruction.<sup>5</sup> Weakness is a common cause of this. Concerning this view, E. M. Forster writes: "Everywhere he Crabbe saw men taking the wrong turnings and thus he represents them. Some went wrong deliberately, but most err through weakness. In the analysis and censure of weakness Crabbe is a specialist."<sup>6</sup> This observation can be easily verified if one considers Clelia who drifted from bad to worse; or Cynthia who joined the players and became a singer. Something akin to weakness but savoring more of blameworthy defects in character is quite clear in persons like the libertine Blaney who finally spent his remaining days as a fitting companion of Clelia in the almshouse;<sup>7</sup> or in those like the proud clerk Jachin who stole from the collection basket in church.<sup>8</sup> It was the vice of overindulgence that made a drunkard out of Abel Keene and eventually threw him into the clutches of death by hanging.<sup>9</sup> And Peter Grimes because of uncontrollable temper had struck down his own father and murdered three boys whom he had hired to work for him.<sup>10</sup> Of course, Crabbe did not fail to realize that degradation is also the result of unfavorable surroundings. Some of his men and women were pulled down to mirky depths because of evil companions and unsavory environment.

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<sup>5</sup>Wylie, p. 105.

<sup>6</sup>E. M. Forster, "George Crabbe," Spectator, CXLVIII (February 20, 1932), p. 244.

<sup>7</sup>"Letter XIV"

<sup>8</sup>"Letter XIX"

<sup>9</sup>"Letter XXI"

<sup>10</sup>"Letter XXII"

Another phase of his psychological interest in characters concerns Crabbe's examination of various types of minds and watching different mental reactions to situations. Strang writes: ". . . he is a psychologist, a student of character, like the novelists; and might have said with Browning: 'The development of a soul; little else is worth study.'<sup>11</sup> The same author shows the consequences of this attitude: "He likes to get behind the scenes and make his people reveal what is in their inmost thoughts, and though this well suits his ironic temper, it brings pathos with it as well."<sup>12</sup> In tracing a mind's converse with itself Crabbe does manifest an interest in psychological reflection. Witness the shrewd duplicity of Swallow, cunning conqueror of all clients; Crabbe traces for his readers the anguish of a repentant soul like that of Ellen Orford's; he mirrors the misery and terror following the half mad realization of Grimes that the murdered souls of three boys and that of his own father are beckoning to him, inviting him to jump into the swelling river and follow; he conveys the great pride of Clelia who recounted triumphantly the conquests and splendours of her faded youth. These are some of the cases which show a tendency to draw up on one side the effects, and on the other side the causes leading to those effects. In tracing gradual decay, slowly increasing vice and misery that ends in wretched death, Crabbe forges steel links that drag their victims on to destruction. This makes his treatment so often mercilessly Realistic.<sup>13</sup>

In the proper development of any character certain good qualities ought

<sup>11</sup>Strang, p. 78.

<sup>12</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Lang, p. 60.

to be present. Without going into a detailed consideration of these qualities, several of them have to be mentioned in order to evaluate the artistic achievement of Crabbe. For the present purposes, the following qualities of character will suffice: clear-cut; consistent with themselves; true to life; apt and suitable.

Several characters of the Borough already considered under another aspect are definitely clear-cut, well-drawn personages. To mention but a few, the Vicar and the Curate have sharp outlines which embrace many individualistic details of character. The Vicar stands out as a distinct person, fashioned more for defense than for conquest, but he is so clearly drawn that he grates upon one's sense of a chivalrous lover and duriful clergyman. Orford is, without a doubt, not only his best woman character but the most thoroughly satisfying person in the entire panoply of unfortunate beings. She discloses more character traits than does any other single creation of Crabbe's in the Borough. With her character the reader feels that he has more substance to deal with, and this is not because she is a lily among the thorns of his degraded human beings. Crabbe reveals her disposition by his skill in disclosing her generous and hopeful soul, amid her frequent tribulations. Apparently using the resignation of soul of this character, Crabbe was driving home the lesson of good and evil, so often to be gleaned only from a negative side -- the failures of his people.

One thing must be borne in mind when the characters are examined for consistency with themselves. In the words of one writer: "The Borough is nothing more than a categorical arrangement of scenes, characters, and in-

cidents without any further unity."<sup>14</sup> This is true, but it does not disqualify the separate characters which enter for a short space of time, act their parts in the story of life, and then make way for another group who have nothing to do with the former ones. Those characters, however briefly and independently they appear, stand for complete, integral personalities whose merits can be evaluated in the single scenes to which they belong. The fact that the Borough is a catalogue of persons does not militate against the creation of an Ellen Orford with definite disposition, sensitive feeling, and submissive attitude towards misfortune. Nor does it imply that her responses to stimuli will betray the character with which the poet has clothed her. Ellen acts as we want any normal girl of fundamentally sound principle to act in the face of continued misfortune. Where the reader receives a gentle surprise is at the end of the passage when Ellen pours forth in beautiful terms the praise of God. This is by exception a surprise ending because Crabbe either fails to bring his other characters to the point where they may show such virtue, or he does not choose to have them do so.

Granting the traits of character that are in Swallow, there is nothing to indicate that the character speaks or acts in contradiction to them. The wily lawyer never falters in his fell purpose towards his clients, nor does he say or do anything out of character.

The other characters of the Borough are no less inconsistent if the correct notion of being consistent is maintained. But if by consistency of character is meant their being true to life, that is another question.

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<sup>14</sup>Collins, p. 587.



Just how true to life Crabbe's characters are, introduces some disagreement. Crabbe himself thought he was quite objective in his creation of characters. In a letter to Mary Leadbeater, one of his friends, he claimed: ". . . there is not one of whom I had not in mind the original;"<sup>15</sup> According to J. Churton Collins, Ellen Orford was Crabbe's own mother. However, this may be, it is true that in general his insight into the workings of the passions and feelings was keen and clear; that his sentiments, moods, reflections, and actions portrayed in his characters are seldom contrary to nature.<sup>16</sup> Woodberry<sup>17</sup> mentions a feature of Realism which he says Crabbe had in the greatest perfection. It is "transparency," the quality in virtue of which life is seen plainly through the text and without distortion.

On the other hand, there is an opinion to the effect that the reader never knows what the characters looked like nor how they would have spoken: ". . . no character is a living figure of a man or woman;"<sup>18</sup> In contrast to this comment of Masefield, Strang observes: ". . . the characters are sketched with sure touch and put in proportion to the story in which they appear; but they need inspiration; they are not fully alive. They are something more than shadows, but in none of them is life full blown."<sup>19</sup> Strang has contributed towards a fair evaluation of Crabbe's characters with this observation. There is something insecure and evanescent about some of the

<sup>15</sup>Letter of George Crabbe to Mary Leadbeater, in The Leadbeater Papers (Bell and Daldy, London, 1862), pp. 230-33.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Woodberry, p. 100.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>18</sup>John Masefield, Recent Prose (Macmillan Co., New York, 1933), p. 292.

<sup>19</sup>Strang, p. 126.

characters, but precisely what it is lies beyond the scope of this treatise. The opinion of Masfield mentioned above also invites some comment. That no character is a living figure of a man or woman is understandable, especially in view of the quotation from Strang above. But that the reader never knows the words and appearance of the characters is hard to conceive after a study of so many characters from whose mouths Crabbe has them describe themselves. On the contrary, Crabbe overburdened his verse with conversation that was quite revealing. As to the appearance of his characters, Crabbe does not bother to tell what figure they had or what clothes they wore. But another complaint has been seriously urged against Crabbe, that he is too detailed, too minute, too exacting in his analysis of men and women. This view does not refer only to the psychological treatment of the inner workings of his mind but to the general appearance, for according to Crabbe's son panegyrists took up this tendency and ridiculed it:

Thy verse from Nature's face each feature drew  
Each lovely charm, each mole, and wrinkle too!<sup>20</sup>

To consider but a few characters that are representative in being true to life, there is Sir Denys, a kind of "bourgeois gentilhomme," simple enough but much like any upstart in politics whose magic touch turns fancies into realities. Blaney and Clelia are no different from the vain, degenerate victims of a fate whose lives have been wrecked almost beyond repair. Too proud to be remorseful, too dull to make amends, they bask in the sunshine of former pleasures, but they are true to life. Swallow and Orford are both examples of characters who might be found on our streets today.

<sup>20</sup>N.B.: this is found in the Edinburgh edition of Crabbe's Works, xii, no reference being made to the author though it has been attributed to a certain Smith.

Considering the purpose Crabbe had in mind, namely, to present ordinary human beings in their customary environment, he has chosen characters who fit in with his scheme. Given the Realistic setting of the Borough Crabbe picked persons who are quite suitable. Only Ellen Orford and Sir Denys might be questioned in his pattern of Realistic persons. These have already been considered suitable to the general atmosphere of the Borough for other reasons. Lang saw in these characters qualities which show up in the setting and characterization of Masters, for he writes: "The importance of his choice of characters is easy to see -- he is opening a vein of poetry to be exploited by the succeeding generations of poets; the Spoon River Anthology is in a direct line of descent."<sup>21</sup> The latter part of this paper will show how Spoon River Anthology compares with Crabbe's poem.

From the foregoing analysis of the qualities of good characterization, it is evident that Crabbe's literary work has both virtues and defects. His limitations prevent him from occupying a place among the better poets; but he enjoys some distinction, and Lang's opinion that it is on account of his power of delineating character seems correct.

One who reads Realistic literature cannot but note the predominance of disillusion, dismay, misery, and fate which accompany the characters in the Borough. Literature that is overburdened with suffering will tend to produce a depressing effect upon the reader. This happens in the Borough. But what is easily overlooked is the fact that, while the total effect is that of dejection, many single characters of the Borough can be interpreted so as to be elevating.

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<sup>21</sup>Lang, p. 127.

In the Borough certain characters have power of elevating the reader by reason of the sacrifice and sympathy which they manifest.

Obviously, the first name which wins admiration for sacrifice is that of Ellen Orford. No other character in the Borough suffers more painfully and less complainingly than she. No other man or woman has such a constant succession of trials, resulting finally in her blindness. Without husband, children, and the adequate means of support, still she goes on, resigned to the will of God, voicing her love for her fellowmen.

The Merchant, referred to earlier as the founder of the almshouse which Sir Denys later ruled, was a respectable old fellow who shunned public recognition of his charity. He preferred to give in secret:

Yet more than once they took him in the fact  
 To scenes of various woe he nightly went,  
 And serious sums in healing misery spent;  
 Oft has he cheer'd the wretched at a rate  
 For which he daily might have dined on plate;  
 He has been seen his hair all silver-white,  
 Shaking and shining -- as he stole by night,  
 To feed unenvied on his still delight.

(Borough, XIII, ll. 25-33)

He even practiced actual poverty:

It was his joy to sit alone and fast,  
 Then send a widow and her boys repast:  
 Tears in his eyes would spite of him appear,  
 But he from other eyes has kept the tear:  
 All in a wintry night from far he came,  
 To soothe the sorrows of a suffering dame;  
 Whose husband robb'd him, and to whom he meant  
 A ling'ring, but reforming punishment:

(Borough, XIII, ll. 36-43)

Surely, a man of such enduring virtue is worthy of imitation. Possibly few other characters of the Borough are capable of creating a similar effect, but more than a dozen cases are available to create sympathy.

Familiar characters whose deeds should not be emulated but whose worthy actions nevertheless engender sympathetic understanding are James, Juliet, Ellen Orford, Clelia, and the Curate.

In the lives of James, Juliet, and Ellen Orford there are certain moral abuses that cannot pass uncondemned. But towards even the hardened sinner, Christian pity and mercy turn a sympathetic face. These characters and others like them deserve a special measure of understanding because of the nobility with which they strive to rise from their sin to new, respectable life. James and Juliet, it is true, were disgraceful, but their attempt to make amends by marriage is praiseworthy. Ellen made only one slip early in life and spent the remainder of her days in paying for it generously. With Clelia it is more difficult to see a rejuvenation, but some readers would find that her "Becky Sharp" nature and immaturity invite compassion.

With one character the reader will certainly sympathize. The Curate was a serious-minded husband who had the welfare of his wife religiously at heart. He gave up his work as has been seen above to take her to the seaside. Lacking resourcefulness and many natural graces of a balanced disposition, he and his family spent a dreary existence just this side of complete failure. For a passive character of this kind there is indeed less deserved blame than for those who boldly sought trouble.

Satire, as an expression of the Realistic attitude, will be treated at length in the next chapter. Here it enters only insofar as it touches some of the lives of the characters and may have an elevating effect on the reader.

The first significant point is that Crabbe had been a disciple of Dryden and of Pope. Both of these men were bitterly sarcastic, but Crabbe has nothing in common with the fiercely personal sarcasm of Pope and Dryden. Crabbe exhibited a profound sense of human frailty which found its way into his sarcasm and his satire. Satire, with Crabbe at least, is always social, and like Hogarth's satire it aims to cure society of its failings and follies.<sup>22</sup>

If one is able to appreciate the satire of Crabbe's professional men, he will have a good example of the manner in which so many of Crabbe's people can serve to elevate the ideals of others. There are, for instance, the Lawyers and Doctors, in whose interests Crabbe spends most of his time with shysters and quacks. About the medical men he wrote sarcastically:

Helpers of men, they're called, and we confess  
Theirs the deep study, theirs the lucky guess;  
(Borough, VII, ll. 5-6)

Swallow represents some of the prevailing abuses in the legal profession. For disorders in the medical profession, Crabbe offers the story of Neddy who made a fortune on his patent medicine.

As these characters are considered, it becomes more evident that in themselves they possess little with which to uplift mankind. But it must be conceded that if satire serves its purpose, then the characters will negatively, at least, furnish mankind with an ideal to strive for.

The players themselves are an example. No person would want to follow in the steps of the Heroine, Cynthia, the Hero, or Peter Nottage. The correct

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. Huchon, pp. 273-74.

conclusion after reading these four lives is that this class of people is open to many temptations; that it is likely to number among its creatures degenerate souls of both sexes; that such a life does not in fact enjoy the colorful sparkle that is seen from across the footlights. Precisely on account of their peculiar conditions, these men and women are ridiculed, and the reader is likely to think of their sad state and resolves that none of that is for him. This seems definitely to be Crabbe's attitude.

Other representative characters who have an elevating effect in this negative kind of manner are the foolish and fearful Vicar; the proud fisherman who became Mayor; Sir Denys, the flashy politician; the pleasure-loving coquette, Clelia. All of these persons are satirized so thoroughly that they stand out as obvious warnings to the wary, and nowhere is the impression left that Crabbe approves of evil in their lives.

Now, in consideration of characters which have a depressing effect, ground more familiar to the Realist is broken again. Once more it must be borne in mind that the same names occur in this division which served to explain the elevating effect of characters above. There is no contradiction implied. First of all, the study is being made from another viewpoint. In the previous treatment there was a question of the "guiding influence" that these characters may be said to have. In this present investigation more emphasis is put upon the total impression. Secondly, few characters in the Borough are so distressing that all uplift is lacking, especially if the notion of a negatively elevating effect be considered. Consequently, a character may be both elevating and depressing, depending upon the approach. Finally, the writer is aware of a certain unavoidable overlapping of treat-

ment here with matter of the next chapter dealing with attitude. Depression is an expression of attitude which may be discussed from a subjective or objective point of view. If the author and his attitude are studied, the investigation may be called subjective; if the depressing character is the center of attention, it is objective.<sup>23</sup> In the study of character, the emphasis rests upon depression considered objectively.

The Realistic setting creates the general atmosphere of gloom, heaviness, melancholy. Amid the dirty streets, the sidewalks covered with rubble, the ineffective sewage disposal, the poor overcrowded houses, can one not expect to find miserable people? Consonant with depressing surroundings are those who inhabit the hovels, many of them dull minds, below the bourgeois temperament.

Without a doubt the tale of so much woe in the Borough about beings who have fallen from noble ideals and have lost their virtue; about professional servants of the people who have bartered their charge for a paltry distinction, a whim, or a livelihood; about ordinary people who have not been able to rise above the level of mediocrity -- a tale of this kind is gloomy. At the very instant when one begins to feel that he has a pleasant story before him, it grows melancholic and heavy. The story of the condemned highwayman shifts in this way from a dream of the keenest pleasures he had ever experienced to the cold realization of his own impending execution.

Then come his sister and his village-friend,  
And he will now the sweetest moments spend  
Life has to yield; -- No! never will he find  
Again on earth such pleasures in his mind:

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<sup>23</sup>N.B.: this is the writer's distinction.



He goes through shrubby walks these friends among,  
 Love in their looks and honour on the tongue:  
 (Borough, XXIII, ll. 291-96)

With tragic suddenness, Crabbe unrolls his mantle of gloom, however, in the last two verses of the Letter with the words

. . . . . Alas! the watchman on his way  
 Calls, and lets in -- truth, terror, and the day!  
 (Borough, XXIII, ll. 532-33)

Especially in a situation in which a depraved character suffers some tragic fate there are the elements of disgust. Strang mentions Jeffrey's opinion to the effect that these characters excite nothing but disgust. Strang believes, however, that Crabbe's fault lies in clumsy handling of his material.<sup>24</sup> Blaney and Clelia mirror this fact in their separate lives before coming to the almshouse. Of Blaney's indifference to duty one reads:

He has some children, but he knows not where;  
 Something they cost, but neither love nor care:  
 (Borough, XIV, ll. 104-05)

And in addition:

He view'd his only guinea, then suppress'd  
 For a short time, the tumults in his breast,  
 And mov'd by pride, by habit, and despair,  
 Gave it an opera-bird to hum an air.  
 (Borough, XIV, ll. 124-27)

Sinking lower into degradation, he strives

To hunt a dinner and to beg a crown;  
 To tell an idle tale, that boys may smile;  
 To bear a strumpet's billet-doux a mile;  
 To cull a wanton for a youth of wealth  
 (With reverend view to both his taste and health);

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<sup>24</sup>Strang, p. 80.

To be a useful, needy thing between  
 Fear and desire -- the pander and the screen;  
 The wildest fashion, or the worst excess;  
 To be the gray seducer, and entice  
 Unbearded folly into acts of vice:  
 (Borough, XIV, ll. 143-53)

Even Crabbe shuns the sight of so depraved a person:

Blaney, no aid in his vile cause to lose,  
 Buys pictures, prints, and a licentious Muse;  
 He borrows every help from every art,  
 To stir the passions and mislead the heart:  
 But from the subject let us soon escape,  
 Nor give this feature all its ugly shape;  
 (Borough, XIV, ll. 183-88)

The mention of other characters such as Clelia, Grimes, Frederick, Swallow, and Abel Keene will show that this moral perversion is not limited to Blaney alone.

A second source of depression is the note of despair in so many of the characters themselves. This element will come up again in the following chapter concerning attitude, but here that attitude will be seen only as a reflection, as an objective representation, of that frame of mind.

One of the most distinctive marks of Crabbe's Realism is found in the study of the gradual decline of his people, their progressive corruption, and the disastrous loss of all hope.<sup>25</sup> Without hope in the future, Crabbe's characters are pitiable victims of mere fate. A few instances of this are worth noting in the case of the men, in whom despair is more pronounced.

The clerk Jachin, who stole from the collection basket, never managed to regain his status in the community. It is interesting to read words describing his dreary condition, such as "dejected," "dismayed," "desponding,"

<sup>25</sup>Huchon, p. 288.

and the use of other Realistic terms like "mud-band," and "marsh-dike."

In each lone place, dejected and dismay'd,  
 shrinking from view, his wasting form he laid;  
 Or to the restless sea and roaring wind  
 Gave the strong yearnings of a ruin'd mind:  
 On the broad beach, the silent summer-day,  
 Stretch'd on some wreck, he wore his life away;  
 Or where the river mingles with the sea,  
 Or on the mud-bank by the elder tree,  
 Or by the bounding marsh-dike, there was he:  
 And when unable to forsake the town,  
 In the blind courts he sat desponding down --

(Borough, XIX, ll. 270-80)

Consumed with remorse, he draws attention to himself as a warning to all men of the fate of sinful mankind and then:

He said, and saw no more the human face;  
 To a lone loft he went, his dying place,  
 And, as the vicar of his state inquired,  
 Turn'd to the wall and silently expired!

(Borough, XIX, ll. 297-300)

Abel Keene had been warned by his sister of the fate that awaited a man of his loose life. She pleaded with him constantly, urging one motive after another, and finally threatened him with

When youth is fallen, there's hope the young may  
 rise,  
 But fallen age for ever hopeless lies;

(Borough, XIX, ll. 142-43)

Almost every vestige of hope had passed out of his conscious mind now and

He heeded not the frost, the rain, the snow,  
 Close by the sea he walk'd alone and slow;  
 Sometimes his frame through many an hour he spread  
 Upon a tombstone, moveless as the dead;  
 And was there found a sad and silent place,  
 There would he creep with slow and measured pace;  
 Then would he wander by the river's tide;  
 The deep dry ditch, the rushes in the fen,  
 And mossy crag-pits were his lodgings then:  
 There, to his discontented thought a prey,

The melancholy mortal pined away.

(Borough, XXI, ll. 195-207)

A paper was found upon his dead body as it hung in a pedlar's barn where he had committed suicide. In the paper he attempted to explain his efforts, but always there was despair cropping from his actions:

Ah! worse for me -- grown poor, I yet remain  
In sinful bonds, and pray and fast in vain.

(Borough, XXI, ll. 250-51)

His final effort was to consult a clergyman who advised him to await the "call." If it came to him, he would be saved; if not, "woe for thee!"

Walter, another example of despair, with unbridled anger towards his family, curses them.

I've not a friend in all the world -- not one:  
I'd be a bankrupt sooner; nay, 'tis done;  
In every better hope of life I fail,  
You're all tormentors, and my house a jail.  
Out of my sight! I'll sit and make my will --

.....  
Away! Away! ten thousand devils seize  
All I possess, and plunder where they please!  
(Borough, VIII, ll. 203ff.)

The ultimate fate of this character is not related.

The last three persons mentioned are the most extreme cases of despair to be found in the Borough. Truly enough, as examples of despair, they are the exception rather than the rule, but they serve to epitomize the spirit of hopelessness that crops up frequently enough in many other characters of minor proportions.

In summary, this chapter has tried to demonstrate some characteristics of Realism embodied in characterization in the Borough. Varley Lang's opinion that Crabbe owes whatever distinction he enjoys to the happy faculty of

character delineation is correct. The Realistic approach to a study of Crabbe's characters properly has its roots in his own upbringing and environment.

In grouping characters for detailed study, it must be kept in mind that the liberty is reserved to use one or more characters in different classifications, depending upon the viewpoint from which they are considered.

Characters are either simple or complex. The simple characters embrace men and women of dignity and also of lowly status. In each case characteristics of Realism are clearly present; predominance of fact over imagination; truth in its cold reality; pessimism and gloom; chance and fate. The complex characters, those whose actions are more likely to be somewhat involved in the mind of the reader, are considered as individuals, psychological cases, or self-destructive failures. In psychological cases, Crabbe pays attention to causes, effects, motives, and reactions which enter in some way into the gradual decay that finally results in a wretched death.

Seldom is a character introduced in the poem without its being developed into a workable portion of the setting. Few characters are such in name only, and any names that are mentioned generally play a part in the total picture as rather clear-cut individuals. Owing to Crabbe's plan of presenting vignettes that have practically no connection one with another, consistency of characterization cannot be so satisfactorily studied. However, if the characters and the plan as conceived by Crabbe are accepted, they appear consistent. Whether they are true to life is disputed. The writer thinks that a solution lies in a synthesis of opposing views, namely, that the

characters are living people who are not sufficiently inspired, not full-blown.

Crabbe's characters have power either to elevate or to depress the reader. Those men and women in the Borough tend to ennoble where sacrifices and sympathy stand forth. Even a degraded life, however, when it is satirized effectively, can in a negative way have an elevating effect upon the reader. But one experiences depression from the countless tales of woe about dull, country people; about depraved souls that in some cases are apt to cause disgust; about the spirit of despair which envelopes a considerable number of the Borough's inhabitants and casts its mantle of gloom over the paths of most of the others.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE REALISTIC ATTITUDE IN THE BOROUGH

Realism in the Borough has been studied thus far under two general headings of setting and characterization. The third division of this treatment, that of attitude, completes this study of Crabbe's Borough from a Realistic point of view.

It is obvious that the attitude of an author is significant enough to color his treatment of persons and places. Crabbe, as well as any other poet, injected within the scenes he created a peculiar spirit, atmosphere, or attitude. Therefore, in a plan that attempts to separate Realistic tendencies into three clear-cut groups, there will be no sharp distinction. Overlapping is unavoidable. Setting cannot be thoroughly handled without considering the attitude of the writer towards his material. Characters cannot be adequately examined without inquiring, to some extent, into the position of the author towards them -- his attitude.

Certainly, the alternative of presenting the attitude first has advantages. After a consideration of Crabbe's mental outlook on life, classifications of setting and characterization may take on more significance for the reader. However, to consider first the author's attitude means that there can be as yet little familiarity with topography and types of people. Characters, action, environment, then have to be introduced to make clear the very study of attitude. If the people and their environs are supplied first, to give a structure upon which to work, attitude can be treated in

a normal fashion, after association with the locals and familiarity with actors has been established. Either plan is satisfactory, especially since attitude cannot be adequately divorced from setting and characterization. The plan followed here, "setting, characterization, attitude," is preferred because it lays the foundation upon which a more thorough treatment of the important phase of attitude may be considered. Besides, attitude being of such great significance in the study of an author, the constant repetition of it from various angles ought to make it more conclusive.

The present chapter concerns Crabbe's life as it serves to explain his Realistic attitude and various aspects under which that attitude is expressed. Manifestations of this attitude appear in great attention to details that at times are unpleasant; in humor, irony, satire; in disillusion; in fate and despair; in preaching and reproof.

The attitude that a man has is not something like a coat that can be quickly put on and as readily discarded. It is a peculiarly personal trait that springs from character, having been deliberately or indeliberately cultivated over a period of years. Crabbe's Realistic coloring of attitude is derived from a composite of circumstances, some deliberately, others indeliberately cultivated and connected with his mental disposition, his family, or his social ineptitudes.

Crabbe's mental equipment was not outstanding at all. He is said to have been somewhat incapable of sustained reasoning; to be likely to become confused in an argument, wander from the point, and then lose his temper.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kebbel, T. E., Life of George Crabbe (Walter Scott, London, 1888), p. 98



Crabbe's son in his biography makes no mention of any deficiency of reasoning power but on the contrary found him a very capable man: "As the chief characteristic of his heart was benevolence, so that of his mind was a buoyant exuberance of thought and perpetual exercise of intellect."<sup>2</sup> Lang thinks that it is not difficult to picture Crabbe as one in whom there is a strong inclination towards reason. He claims that Crabbe disliked high flights of imagination because he possessed the Realist's distaste for artificiality and sham which he felt to be a part of highly emotional treatment. And like most Realists, Crabbe distrusted feeling that was uncurbed or undirected by reason and common sense. There being considerable "mind" mixed up with his affections, Crabbe may, therefore, appeal more to those who have in their mental makeup an equal proportion of heart to head.<sup>3</sup> It is plain that all three commentators are using "reason" in different senses. The fact is that Crabbe was not much of a "thinker" but spent considerable time in thinking!

A common function of Crabbe's intellectual activity was his psychological interest in men. Mental processes and the motives that impel them to action figured in his analysis of situations and persons.<sup>4</sup> For example, there is his revelation of development of a mental state. Frequently, he delved into the anatomy of degenerate minds and into the psychology of those who have failed in life.<sup>5</sup> This Realistic touch has already been noted in

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<sup>2</sup>George Crabbe (son), Life of George Crabbe by His Son (Oxford University Press, London, 1932), p. 133.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-16.

<sup>4</sup>Lang, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup>Huchon, p. 288.

the lives of Jachin, Clelia, and Grimes.<sup>6</sup>

Crabbe's family life throws considerable light upon his growth in characteristics plainly Realistic. He was an individual of "great kindness and simplicity, mingled with an element of ceremonious politeness."<sup>7</sup> But Crabbe was wholly disappointed in his early life in the Borough. He longed to go to London to study medicine. This opened up one more avenue of misery: ". . . and yet, had he foreseen all the sorrows and disappointments which awaited him in his new career, it is probably he would have remained in his native place. . ."<sup>8</sup> At home once more, after bitter experience in London, he saw his father in 1774 take to taverns in consequence of success in his newly adopted political interests. Crabbe very dutifully stood by his mother in the outbursts that followed, consoling and assisting her at this time when her health also began to fail.<sup>9</sup> Lang sees in the period of her decline the influence which brings out most strongly one phase of his Realism, the decay and deterioration of characters on the road to final corruption.<sup>10</sup> Here it seems that Lang has made a mistake in assigning Crabbe's mother as the occasion of this influence on Crabbe. Lang cites the dates of her decline as 1798-1813; her grandson offers 1774-1813. It may be supposed that Lang meant Crabbe's wife to be the chief influence upon this aspect of his Realism, for it was she who from 1796-1813 suffered extreme moods of alternate joy and

<sup>6</sup>Note: see letters "XIX," "XV," and "XXII."

<sup>7</sup>Kebbel, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup>Crabbe (son), p. 49.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>10</sup>Lang, p. 60.

sorrow.<sup>11</sup> At any rate, the sickness of both his mother and his wife bothered the poet, then occupied with the plan of the Borough which was written from 1804-1809.

In 1785, Crabbe ceased writing poetry for some unknown reason and did not turn his pen to the Muse for twenty years. When he did, it was to produce the Borough, published in 1810. In the meantime, after waiting eleven years to provide security enough for Sara Elmy, at the age of thirty-three he married her.<sup>12</sup> Three years later, in 1790, Crabbe consulted a doctor about a fit of indigestion. The opiates prescribed as a remedy were probably continued for quite a time afterwards, and Huchon believed that their use possibly produced excitement rather than calm, even occasional fits of depression.<sup>13</sup> This is a partial explanation of some of Crabbe's gloominess. Sarah's condition, referred to above, caused her husband considerable inconvenience, but he endured his cross, humoring her in her fluctuating conditions of extreme joy and sorrow, often taking her, on short notice, to London, the seaside, or wherever her fearful nature prompted her to go. In addition to this is the further fact that by 1796 death had reduced his children from five to two. During this period of gloom and deterioration of both mother and wife, Lang sees that the seeds of despair, disillusion, decay, and deterioration were being cultivated in Crabbe.

Crabbe was not popular among people. As a clergyman he was expected to be a man of sports. Apparently, all he wanted from the ministry, or at

<sup>11</sup>Huchon, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 374.

least his chief purpose in entering it, was the wherewithal to provide leisure for writing. This secured, he had no further interest in the customary routine of a Protestant clergyman of his day. Moreover, because of his distaste for argument and the subsequent loss of his temper in a dispute, he shunned conversation. Actually, he had such a limited interest in things that he was out of place in a conversation about art, music, literature, painting, philosophy, politics, and religion.<sup>14</sup>

It is not unusual to find a person develop a frame of mind like that of a Realist, if the conditions are present. Crabbe faced a great amount of trouble over a long period of his life. Many years of his earlier days he spent trying to establish himself in the difficult calling of poet. Always limited by narrow interests, he saw things through the squinting eyes of a scientist. Crabbe was in truth the logical outgrowth of a confined nature and dreary surroundings.

A nature so stilted and so styled as Crabbe's was appropriately expressed itself in specific details, scientific observation, painful exactness. Much of this was seen in the treatment given setting and characterization. The attitude indicated by this type of work shows that Crabbe was interested in actual objects, not Romantic and fanciful ones. This is symbolized in a very unpoetic verse from "Letter XVI": "Our bold fathers loved to fight and drink." In many instances he carried the actual into commonplace details and unpleasantries of a prosaic nature.

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<sup>14</sup>Kebbel, p. 98.

What was Crabbe's purpose in introducing into his poetry: sewers; refuse-laden streets; mud and slime of the dirty streams; smelly tenements; questionable hotels; stained, despicable characters? Details of this nature need explanation.

Crabbe's answer to this challenge reveals his determination to get at the true state of affairs:

By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,  
As truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.  
(*"Village,"* I, ll. 53-54)

Crabbe's son suggests a defense in the following:

He Crabbe wished to draw a correct picture of the laboring poor in contrast with the imaginary one, which had long done duty for the real. . . . He would tell the whole truth. He would paint the poor as they really were. If he asked us to compassionate their poverty, he was not justified in throwing a veil over their vices.<sup>15</sup>

In the "Preface" to the "Tales" Crabbe enuntiated the theory that the end of poetry is to lift the mind from painful realities of actual existence. This may be done suitably ". . . by a faithful delineation of those painful realities . . . provided they be not . . . the very concerns and distresses of the reader?"<sup>16</sup> Whatever the value of this doctrine, this is his purpose.

There has been criticism of Crabbe's use of distasteful subject-matter, and some of the comments have fallen wide of the point. For instance, Hazlitt blamed Crabbe for turning "diseases to commodity." Kebbel claims Hazlitt ". . . does not seem to see that he Crabbe was a satirist first and

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>16</sup>Edinburgh edition of the *Works*, p. 262f.

a poet afterwards."<sup>17</sup> Kebbel's explanation is more satisfying, namely, that his fault is a lack of propriety, an ". . . imperfectly cultivated taste which prevented him from seeing that he was overstepping the line between subjects repulsive and necessary for his subject-matter and those wantonly disgusting." This is a very sensible statement of the offensive aspect of Crabbe's Realism.

Crabbe himself realized that bounds exist beyond which it is indecent to go. In picturing the almshouse in "Letter XIV" he stops short of recounting further licentiousness of Blaney with the remark:

But from the subject let us soon escape,  
Nor give this feature all its ugly shape;  
(Borough, XIV, 11. 187-88)

The obvious remedy for offensive details is more selectivity that rejects disgusting elements. A contemporary of Crabbe indicated in the Quarterly Review for November 1810 that this selectivity would have been worthwhile cultivating. "When he escapes from his favorite topics of vulgarity and misery," he writes, "he throws off his defects and purifies himself as he ascends into a purer region."<sup>19</sup>

The natural reaction to these charges of too much detail, too sordid topics, too much unpleasantness is to believe that Crabbe was, in Hazlitt's words, "a gloomy, dissatisfied poet." Misery abounds in the Borough. There is gloom. Crabbe, nevertheless, has some delightful pastoral scenes. In

<sup>17</sup>Op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>19</sup>Op cit., p. 293.

his poetry there are over twenty descriptions of the sea in its various moods. Huchon compared Crabbe's ability to paint delicate vignettes in all their infinite detail with that of Tennyson, the master of this type of picture, but he acknowledged Tennyson as the superior artist, particularly wherever Crabbe had to rely upon his imagination. An ability to lay aside temporarily the dusky robes of a grim Realist bespeaks a more balanced attitude and suggests that Crabbe's attitude, while it was Realistic, was not without its splendour.

Humor, being a quality that appeals to a sense of the ludicrous or incongruous, is a characteristic of Realists. Inquiring as the Realist does into all the various angles that aid in studying human relations, he is particularly delighted in catching mankind in its absurd moments. This was a device of Moliere, Balzac, Daumier, Hogarth, Jane Austen, and other Realists.<sup>20</sup>

The humorous side of Crabbe's attitude towards life in the Borough is generally tender and sympathetic, seldom hard and cruel.<sup>21</sup> Occasionally, it is jarring, when Crabbe's only excuse is the "truth" of the picture.<sup>22</sup> It may be very sly like Hogarth's in his sketches in which the situation is sufficiently painful in itself.<sup>23</sup>

A few examples of playful humor repay consideration since they show the

<sup>20</sup>Lang, p. 49.

<sup>21</sup>Vid. the Heroine, "Letter XII" ll. 97-116.

<sup>22</sup>Lang, p. 51.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

brighter aspect of Crabbe's Realism. The cavalier Vicar

Smiling he came, he smiled when he withdrew,  
And paid the same attention to the two;  
(Borough, III, ll. 27-28)

The young girl referred to above could brook no delay because

She found her tortoise held such sluggish pace,  
That she must turn and meet him in the chase;  
(Borough, III, ll. 33-34)

But the teaching of the Vicar was gentle for

Mild were his doctrines, and not one discourse  
But gain'd in softness what it lost in force;  
(Borough, III, ll. 106-07)

His epitaph could well read:

Nor one so old has left this world of sin,  
More like the being that he enter'd in.  
(Borough, III, ll. 164-65)

In another instance, the dignity of a preacher is ridiculed crudely:

See yonder Preacher! to his people pass,  
Borne up and swelled by tabernacle gas!  
(Borough, IV, ll. 270-71)

Frequenters of the watering-places and spas along the seaside enjoy themselves

When evening comes, our invalids awake,  
Nerves cease to tremble, heads forebear to aches;  
Then cheerful meals and sunken spirits raise,  
Cards or the dance, wine, visiting, or plays.  
(Borough, IX, ll. 10-13)

The medics are sarcastically dubbed

Helpers of men they're called, and we confess  
Theirs the deep study, theirs the lucky guess.  
(Borough VI, ll. 5-6)

Politics takes considerable "ribbing" from the poacher who descends upon  
a party-member:



One enters hungry, not to be denied,  
 And takes his place and jokes -- "We're of a side."  
 (Borough, V, ll. 37-38)

The political candidates are

Friends who will hang like burs upon his coat,  
 And boundless judge the value of a vote.  
 (Borough, V, ll. 313-15)

And even the devil has to bide his time, waiting for Jachin to fall into  
 his trap for

No wonder he should lurk and lie in wait,  
 Should fit his hooks and ponder on his bait,  
 Should on his movements keep a watchful eye;  
 For he pursued a fish who led the gry.  
 (Borough, XIX, ll. 48-51)

Grim humor stares from a few situations in the Borough. For example,  
 Peter Nottage left everything to become an actor.

And, after years consumed, infirm and poor,  
 He sits and takes the tickets at the door.  
 (Borough, XII, ll. 181-82)

As Grimes, responsible for the deaths of three of his hired boys, uncoiled  
 his whip and lashed into one of them, bystanders

Said calmly, "Grimes is at his exercise."  
 (Borough, XXII, ll. 78)

The reckless, wanton Blaney

Thus was he pleased to join the laughing side,  
 Nor ceased the laughter when his lady died;  
 (Borough, XIV, ll. 98-99)

Notwithstanding these examples that represent the type of humor that  
 is not scarce in the Borough, Alfred Ainger finds that Crabbe's ". . . lack  
 of humor was definite and accounts for much of the diffuseness and formless-

ness of his poetry."<sup>24</sup> Since the writer has not made a detailed study of all of Crabbe's poetry, it is not prudent to state that Crabbe is a "humorous" Realist. But this much is true: that there are many humorous touches of incident and of character in the Borough; that without evidence to the contrary, Crabbe's attitude was not tailored to fit this one poem only; that even if the humor in this poem does not represent the typical attitude of Crabbe, still it is one phase of the Realist's approach and as such lends itself properly to this investigation of Realistic characteristics in the Borough.

Like humor, irony and satire do service for the Realist. Irony with Crabbe at times implies more than expressing one thing and meaning the opposite. While it is usually humorous, keen, and tender, it often borders upon the grim tragic side. This is quite clear in the story of the excursion party that went out for a gay picnic on the narrow stretch of land. Those people, cut off by the rising tide, barely escaped with their lives.<sup>25</sup> There is a touch of tragic irony in the account of the players whose roles do not mirror their lives of hardship and disappointment.<sup>26</sup> Another example is Grimes' answer to inquiries about his recent helper, "I found him lifeless in his bed;"<sup>27</sup>

Satire means holding up to ridicule the vices or follies of people, colored or pervaded by the author's feelings. Lang maintains that Crabbe

<sup>24</sup>Alfred C. Ainger, Crabbe (English Men of Letters Series), (The Macmillan Co., New York, 1903), p. 118.

<sup>25</sup>"Letter IX," ll. 206-96)

<sup>26</sup>"Letter XII" entire.

<sup>27</sup>"Letter XII" l. 96.

has an often unnoticed irony that is "tongue-in-the-cheek."<sup>28</sup>

An excellent revelation of Crabbe's purpose behind his satire is provided by a little poem entitled "Satire," written in August, 1818, found in Crabbe's "Occasional Pieces." It reads:

I love not the satiric Muse,  
No man on earth would I abuse;  
Nor with empoison'd verses grieve  
The most offending son of Eve;  
Leave him to law, if he have done  
What injures any other son.<sup>29</sup>

The fact is that Crabbe himself had no intention of being personal in his satiric pieces. In the Borough concerning schools, Crabbe writes thus:

Man's Vice and Crime I combat as I can,  
But to his God and conscience leave the Man;  
.....  
But is there man whom I would injure? -- No!  
I am to him a fellow, not a foe, --  
.....  
Yet as I can, I point the powers of rhyme,  
And, sparing criminals, attack the crime.  
(Borough, XXIV, ll. 453-68)

This endeavor is certainly social, not individual or personal like that of his predecessors Dryden and Swift. Huchon's observation that it has the social betterment of the people in mind, just as Hogarth's satire in his painting, has been referred to in connection with satiric characters.

Crabbe's attitude towards satire ought to be rather clear from the analysis given to satirical characters in the previous chapter. There, individual characters, some of whose actions allow a satirical comment, were

<sup>28</sup>Op cit., p. 44.

<sup>29</sup>Note: Quoted by Huchon, p. 273.

pointed out for their power to elevate ideals. It is only in a broader view of his satire, however, that there is full realization how much satire enters into his attitude.

Religious practices of ministers who were not all they were supposed to be, are satirized in such characters as the Vicar, the Curate, the clerk Jachin, and the Calvinistic enthusiast. The first three indicate that Crabbe was well aware of the temptations and hardships that clergymen must endure. The Calvinistic preacher exhibits more satire of certain personal traits of the ministers.<sup>30</sup> Men of this caliber who scorned learning, even copied their sermons and read them to the congregations; they preached the "call" as the definitive sign of conversion; they defended their manifestations of pride because their gifts came from God!

A detailed consideration of the institutions and classes of people satirized by Crabbe in the Borough would make an extensive study. The present purpose, since it deals only with satire as an expression of attitude, can be adequately satisfied by indicating satire in a few fields that are representative. Politics has disciples who bring home all kinds of gossip. It does not escape corruption in voting: the simple voter prays to God for light in casting his vote; the ambitious Mayor strives for high ideals but fails ("Letter V"). Medicine languishes with quacks like the illiterate Neddy who had made a fortune on patent medicine and with those others who solicit testimonials for their nefarious quackery ("Letter VII"). Social and literary clubs lost their original purpose, the members indulging in

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<sup>30</sup>"Letter IV," ll. 330-86.

easting, drinking, gaming, and monopolized conversation ("LetterX").

The study of disillusion as another expression of Crabbe's attitude opens up ground that is unquestionably Realistic. How disillusionment developed in Crabbe is clear from the disappointments that weighed upon his narrow nature. The revelation of his spirit itself as part of his attitude remains to be considered more widely than it was in the treatment of disillusioned characters. In the previous chapter disillusion was divided into subjective and objective, and the characters were studied under the objective heading. In this chapter disillusion will be considered subjectively, that is, from the viewpoint of the author.

The attitude of the Realist is pessimistic. He is always ready to call attention to vanishing pleasures and ever-present evils in the world. He is so earthly minded that he never lets man forget his lowly birth in an imperfect world. Does Crabbe, the clergyman whose profession it is to raise mankind to lofty ideals with thoughts of the next life in heaven -- does Crabbe subscribe to these mundane thoughts?

Crabbe's attitude towards life had been so affected by his own personal experiences that he had become conditioned, as it were, to respond in a similar manner. Its normal functioning brought out disappointments, failure, decay, decline, misery. Lang said of his attitude: "His narrative turns again on desires thwarted and hopes frustrated. Living seems to be," he continues, "the successive stages of disillusion."<sup>31</sup> Hazlitt, himself dis-

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<sup>31</sup>Op. cit., p. 11.

illusioned concerning Crabbe, maintained: "Our poet's verse does not put a spirit of youth in everything, but a spirit of fear, despondency, and decay ... ."32 These words are strong, and unless Crabbe's spirit of humor and satire (not bitter or personal but social) clearly evident in the Borough at the same time be kept in mind, the notion that Crabbe is a dissatisfied poet will be passed on without due reservation.

Was Crabbe disillusioned about the actors? about human desires for glory and good fortune? about the professions of law and medicine? about the various quarrelling church factions? the new experience in Aldeburgh's plan of herding together into one house the poor of the Borough?

Notwithstanding the humor and obvious satire on the players, Crabbe saw them as poor, depressed, unfortunate people.<sup>33</sup> Blaney and Peter Nottage show how an accumulated fortune can be easily wasted. Crabbe thought the professions were a far cry from anything desirable. In their numbers, men think they have public servants, but they find themselves hopelessly paying homage to untrained, deceitful scoundrels ("Letter VI"; "Letter VII"). Crabbe believed that too much time and energy were spent arguing about inconsequential religious doctrines and practices ("Letter IV"). Even in a school system that provided for formal education of pupils at every age level, Crabbe found fault with the courses or methods of study. He asks pessimistically

"But is it sure that study will repay  
The more attentive and forbearing?" -- Nay!

<sup>32</sup>Op cit., p. 331.

<sup>33</sup>"Letter XII" ll. 66-85.

The farm, the ship, the humble shop have each  
Gains which severest studies seldom reach.

(Borough, XXIV, ll. 343-46)

The new poor relief plan, by means of which human beings were herded together into one house where miseries, diseases, and evil habits were readily contracted, left Crabbe dismayed. Certainly, Crabbe had no misgivings about an earthly paradise, but it is extreme bias to think about him as the skeptical Mr. Hazlitt did: "The world is one vast infirmary; the hill of Parnassus is a penitentiary of which our author is the overseer. To read him is a penance," he continues, "yet we read on!"<sup>34</sup> This bespeaks either a lack of study or of good faith. The fact that Hazlitt admits that people "read on" infers that there must be relief from this disillusion or intrinsic worth of another kind to compel interest.

Fate stalking its victims is another mark of the Realist. Crabbe, despite his religious beliefs, found fate a convenient device for explaining misery in human life. Fate is what impelled Abel Keene and Jachin to their destinies of misery. Only another degree of fate could have saved them. There is, of course, no real indication of determinism in Crabbe's own attitude towards fate, but that the powers of fate rule the wicked is clear in two of his blackest characters. Of both Clelia and Blaney he says:

And mourn their grievous fall and curse their  
rigorous fate.

(Borough, XV, ll. 218)

And Blaney:

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<sup>34</sup>Op. cit., p. 331.

Unhappy man! what pains he takes to state --  
 (Proof of his fear!) that all below is fate;  
 That all proceed in one appointed track,  
 Where none can stop, or take their journey back;  
 (Borough, XIV, ll. 159-62)

These two creatures could do little about their course of events. He thought the same was true of the poor people who had to toil in slimy streets, pushing salt barrels until their backs strained and their arms ached. Fate made these humble people servants of the dreary surroundings to which they were bound. Fate it was that singled out some as more prosperous villagers -- the professional men, the successful upper class, and the quacks who made a living by deceitful practices.

Particularly when this fate is consciously experienced by the characters themselves, they are led to despair. Crabbe himself knew what despair meant because he had had disheartening experience. Undoubtedly, his attitude towards an unrelenting fate was quite courageous, for whether he believed that fate was preventing him from reaching his goal in life he actually did not despair. Not far from such a state of mind, however, he knew how it felt to abandon hope. He knew likewise that some victims of fate would succumb. So, his life itself seems proof against the idea that he looked upon life as if it were ruled by unrelenting fate and accompanying despair.

The character of Jachin reflects despair in clear form. The ill-fated actress Cynthia manifests it:

Sick without pity, sorrowing without hope,  
 See her! the grief and scandal of the troop;  
 (Borough, XII, ll. 145-46)

The sailor lad who had returned from the arctic in time to die in the arms



of his sweetheart could not keep burning the fires of hope.

He tried to smile, and, half succeeding, said,  
 "Yes! I must die;" and hope forever fled.  
 (Borough, II, ll. 221-22)

A good indication that Crabbe was no extreme fatalist rests on the fact that no fatalist spends much time trying to elevate morals. But Crabbe has been criticized for reproving, censuring, moralizing, and preaching in his poetry. In this respect Crabbe manifests some of the didactic characteristics of the classicist. As a good preacher, he would be expected, from time to time, to reprove, censure, moralize, and preach, but it is difficult to introduce these qualities into good poetry. In the final analysis of these traits of attitude, considerable light is thrown from another angle upon Crabbe's purpose in his satire and naturally upon his Realism.

Miss Wylie epitomizes Crabbe's code of morality in the following:

"Honesty, industry, frugality lead to happiness; evils of poverty come from want of right living and industry."<sup>35</sup> Incidentally, this code has some bearing on the connection between fate and the penalty for sin considered above. The consideration of satire indicated that Crabbe's attitude towards sin was very definite. He condemned the sin, without severely attacking the sinner. This code strengthened him to preach against vice and moral corruption fearlessly.

One of the most flagrant abuses held up to scorn in the Borough was the deceit and questionable commercial practices of quacks and sellers of fake remedies. Crabbe almost openly admits failure in his crusade against them,

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<sup>35</sup>Op. cit., p. 99.

but he continues to preach in opposition:

Alas! in vain is my contempt express'd  
 To stronger passions are their words address'd  
 To pain, to fear, to terror, their appeal,  
 To those who, weakly reasoning, strongly feel.  
 What then our hope? perhaps there may by law  
 Be method found these pests to curb and awe;  
 Yet in this land of freedom law is slack  
 With any being to commence attack;  
 Then let us trust to science -- there are those  
 Who can their falsehoods and their frauds disclose,  
 All their vile trash detect, and their low tricks expose;  
 Perhaps their numbers may in time confound  
 Their arts -- as scorpions give themselves the wound;  
 For when these curers dwell in every place,  
 While of the cured we not a man can trace,  
 Strong truth may then the public mind persuade,  
 And spoil the fruits of this nefarious trade.

(Borough, VII, ll. 280-96)

For examples of advice given to individuals, the sketches of Keene, Blaney, and Sally are representative. Abel Keene is frequently lectured to by his sister who works feverishly to avert catastrophe in his life. "Do penance! Amend your ways!" is the substance of her cry written between the lines of "Letter XXI." Crabbe expressed his views on stopping moral disintegration through the person of this girl. Sally is warned not to fret over the loss of her sailor-lover in words that gleam with rays of hope, but nevertheless there is a strong touch of Realism:

Forbear, sweet Maid! nor be by Fancy led,  
 To hold mysterious converse with the dead;  
 For sure at length thy thoughts, thy spirit's pain,  
 In this sad conflict will disturb thy brain;  
 All have their tasks and trials; thine are hard;  
 But short the time, and glorious the reward;  
 Thy patient spirit to thy duties give,  
 Regard the dead, but to the living live.

(Borough, II, ll. 265-72)

Blaney is made an object lesson for all who spend their money living riot-

ously. For them Crabbe draws a moral:

Come ye! who live for Pleasure, come, behold  
 A man of pleasure when he's poor and old;  
 When he looks back through life, and cannot find  
 A single action to relieve his mind;  
 When he looks forward, striving still to keep  
 A steady prospect of eternal sleep;  
 When not one friend is left, of all the train  
 Whom 'twas his pride and boast to entertain, --  
 Friends now employ'd from house to house to run,  
 And say, "Alas! poor Blaney is undone!" --  
 Those whom he shock with ardour by the hand,  
 By whom he stood as long as he could stand,  
 Who seem'd to him from all deception clear,  
 And who, more strange! might think themselves  
 sincere.

(Borough, XIV, 11. 128-41)

The first two verses of the passage just quoted illustrate a very common style in which Crabbe is wont to deliver his lessons.

Realistically, Crabbe's rakes and low characters seldom reform.<sup>36</sup>

Blaney and Clelia spent their last days cursing the fate that brought them there, to their misery in the poorhouse. Other nameless minor characters in the Borough, frequenters of the inns, dirty hotels, tenements, and the inhabitants of the almshouse were not saved by the preaching of anyone.

There is a stronger tone about some of Crabbe's preaching which is more properly registered as disapproval. When Crabbe disapproves strongly, he censures and reprooves. Of the twenty-four letters which comprise the Borough, four are given over to describing the almshouse or its inmates. Underlying the descriptions of this social institution and its poor inmates there is the view that herding together into one building all kinds of

<sup>36</sup>Lang, p. 16.

destitute men and women, without respect for interests, character, and background is disastrous. Crabbe fought this scheme, which endeavored to supplant the customary subsidizing of the poor in their own homes, because he saw its evil effects upon the unfortunate victims of it. Besides, he knew that selfishness and vain pride of the overseers was promoting it. There is running through all of these letters a veiled disapproval and dissatisfaction with the plan. Blaney, Clelia, and Benbow, whose lives were synonymous with improper living, are associated with the almshouse only because the admission of these renegades by the officials draws attention to lack of foresight in the plan that had so little regard for God's poor. The best single expression of Crabbe's viewpoint is found in the following verses:

Your plan I love not; with a number you  
 Have placed your poor, your pitiable few;  
 There, in one house, throughout their lives to be,  
 The pauper-palace which they hate to see;  
 That giant-building, that high-bounding wall,  
 Those bare-worn walks, that lofty thundr'ing hall,  
 That large loud clock, which tolls each dreaded hour,  
 Those gates and locks, and all those signs of power;  
 It is a prison, with a milder name,  
 Which few inhabit without dread or shame.  
 (Borough, XCIII, ll. 109-18)

In the same letter he comments on the carelessness of the Borough's leaders who fail to discharge their duties:

Here our reformers come not; none object  
 To paths polluted, or upbraid neglect;  
 None care that ashy heaps at doors are cast,  
 That coal-dust flies along the blinding blast:  
 None heed the stagnant pools on either side,  
 Where new-launched ships of infant-sailors ride;  
 (Borough, XCIII, ll. 275-80)

There may be other similar indications of reproof in the Borough, but

they are not frequent. Forster, speaking about Crabbe's attitude in general, not as manifested precisely in the Borough, finds reproof so congenial to Crabbe that he would bestow upon him the epithet "reproving." He writes: ". . . disapproval is as natural in his Crabbe's hands as thunder in Carlyle's and he never spares himself."<sup>37</sup> This seems to represent the more general opinion, but it is not from the Borough that the main grounds for it stem. Another charge that Crabbe has more contempt for his characters than tenderness and pity was made by a contemporary.<sup>38</sup> This charge likewise fails to satisfy the writer in reference to the Borough, for even for Crabbe's most despicable characters there is no contempt expressed. The total impression of the worst of them is that Crabbe is presenting facts. On the contrary, there are many characters for whom he shows considerable pity. His attitude towards people like the Curate, Neddy, James and Juliet, all of the actors, even Blaney, Swallow, and Keene is one of tender sympathy. Covering the whole of Crabbe's poetry it may be correct to say that his attitude of reproof is contemptuous, but that is not the impression left by a careful reading of the Borough.

In conclusion, this chapter has endeavored to analyze carefully the Realistic attitude of Crabbe towards the materials that he used in his setting and characterization. Before taking up the actual expression of his attitude, certain influencees were sought out that tended to mold his outlook on things. His mental background was considered, revealing shortcomings

<sup>37</sup>Forster, p. 244.

<sup>38</sup>Quarterly Review, IV, 293.

and a psychological interest in motives. His family life opened up interesting facts bearing upon his peculiar development as a Realist: disappointment throughout the greater part of his life; effects of dope; problems connected with sickness of his wife and mother. Finally, lack of social graces marked him as a man of unusually limited interests, without sufficient motivation from his professional calling to broaden them by association with others.

Various topics as manifestations of Crabbe's attitude were considered separately. Stressing of details and specific treatment of subject-matter were introduced. Into this field of inquiry the use of common-place and unpleasant topics entered. The purpose Crabbe had in using these lay in his Realistic inclinations. His chief fault in parading unpleasant details appeared as a lack of propriety and balanced judgment.

Humor, irony, and satire are three related subjects that enter into the Realistic frame of mind. Humor was revealed as sympathetic and tender but occasionally jarring in those circumstances in which Crabbe is led by his determination to expose the truth. In this respect, it is similar to the painter Hogarth's. Examples of playful humor and grim humor were presented. In contrast, the opinion of Ainger that Crabbe lacks humor was shown to have little basis in the Borough itself, however true it may be of his other poetry.

Irony in the Borough appears generally in a tragic form. Examples were mentioned to illustrate this aspect of Crabbe's attitude. It is, however, a kind of overall picture of connected events or sequence of actions,

like the incidents concerning the players, from which the irony stems.

Satire is appropriate to the Realist because he can use it to express disapproval of society and its conventions. Crabbe intended no personal harm to any individuals whom he satirized. Examples show that Crabbe hoped for the improvement of institutions and classes of people that fell under his pen.

On the darker side of Realism, disillusion was presented as the prevailing spirit hovering over man during most of his joys in life. Not that disillusion precludes all laughter. Humor and satire are proof against that in the Borough. But Crabbe is not deceived by any fancies or imaginings about the true state of affairs. He was not misled so effectively as to call a spade a shovel. Thus, while the sun is still shining in the blue sky overhead, Crabbe reminds his readers that all is not well in the world, at least not so well as it then seems.

Bearing down upon this gloomy aspect of Realism is fate that hounds its victims eventually into a wretchedness that breeds despair. But it is seldom good people who despair. Comparatively few men and women in the Borough abandon all hope, and they are generally gravely responsible for their own misfortunes. Still, physical determinism is not present in the Borough. However, exactly how fate, freedom of the will, and ruin by self-destruction are reconciled is not perfectly clear. The fact that determinism does not rule supremely implies that fate is not unrelenting. Men, then, are free to choose or not to choose. The wicked mortals by their own evil actions finally act out what fate somehow had in store for them.

The fact that fate cannot be unrelenting in Crabbe's attitude is clear from a realization of the time he gives to preaching and moralizing. The purpose behind his satire is the correction of whatever abuse he ridiculed. Even when not satirical he found fault with wrongdoing and called attention to disorder. When he became severely critical, his disapproval took the form of reproof. The charge that Crabbe's reproof was contemptuous and that reproving befits him as an epithet is not warranted from a study of the Borough, in which he shows tenderness towards even the most reckless of his characters.

Thus far, this paper has been confined to a study of Crabbe's Borough. Characteristics of Realism and its related tendencies to Naturalism have been explained in the "Introduction" as they are understood in this study. Under three general headings: setting, characterization, and attitude the characteristics of Realism in the Borough have been analyzed.

Now, in the second part of this study the other part of this problem remains to be examined: the analysis of Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology, with a view to noting in it similar Realistic tendencies and especially characteristics of Naturalism. The same classifications of setting, characterization, and attitude form the structure within which signs of Naturalism will be pointed out. Finally, in the course of this further study there will be reference to the Borough and to the analyses made in the first three chapters. This will be accomplished by drawing a comparison between the Realism of Crabbe in the Borough and that of Masters in the Anthology. Differences of social customs and conditions in these two related poems will appear from the investigation itself and will not be specifically treated



as such.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NATURALISTIC SETTING IN THE SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY

For a review of the meaning of Naturalism as it is used in this paper, the reader is referred to the "Introduction" entitled, "The purpose of the Thesis -- Realism -- Naturalism." Let it suffice to recall that Naturalism is a by-product, and exaggerated form of Realism that is less selective in its choice of subject-matter and more bold in the presentation of it.

To produce Naturalistic traits that show up in the style of an author, various influences have to operate in a certain way. In the chapter on attitude the forces that tend to make of Masters a Naturalist will be more thoroughly demonstrated. There are, however, internal and external forces like heredity and environment -- the frame of mind, domestic conditions, and social circumstances -- that help to mold a true disciple of a system of thought or a style of expression. A brief summary of the life of Masters forms a background that will throw light upon his literary setting, characterization, and attitude.

On August 23, 1869, Edgar Lee Masters was born in Garnett, Kansas, of parents who were as different in disposition as they were in family background. Masters' mother came from a stern Methodist family in New Hampshire. She was high-keyed, obstinate, straight-laced, and ill-suited to managing details of a prairie home. Hardin W. Masters, his father, was a lawyer, a free-thinker, a liberal in religious belief who showed himself a constant defender of the rights of the people in a community that was beset by reforming Puritans.

Within one year of Edgar's birth his parents moved into Illinois to live with his paternal grandmother, who had a strong influence upon the boy for many years. When Edgar was six, the Masters family moved to Petersburg, Illinois, a few miles distant. It was a drab country-town, where his father became state's attorney; as a consequence, the boy and the family had to be constantly on the lookout for criminal acts of reprisal by hoodlums for whom this state's attorney had obtained a conviction.

From his sixth to his twenty-second year Edgar lived in Lewistown, another rustic settlement only a few miles from Petersburg. This offered an improvement over conditions in the former village where they had lived. Here he went to school, saw the machinations in politics that long prevented his father's establishing a profitable law practice, began to read widely and to write verse. During these years he cultivated a spirit that derived from his father -- a spirit of liberalism and free-thinking that shaped his character for life. Here also without much supervision, and no prudent direction, he began reading authors like Huxley, Spencer, Locke, Hume, and Kant. Of course, the greater part of this was done during his year in Galesburg at Knox College, at the age of nineteen. At Galesburg he appears to have read widely, laying a foundation in the classics and in English literature.

Forced to abandon college for lack of funds, he reluctantly took up the study of law in his father's office; but writing for the local newspaper and composing verse for occasional publication occupied his interest. One day, dissatisfied in not being able to become a writer and on the occasion

of a quarrel with his mother over a literary matter, he took the train to Chicago in order to try his fortune there. This started another period of his life, none the less difficult and disappointing.

The great city of Chicago did not smile upon the literary aspirant. He walked about the loop wearily and across the South Side throughout the summer and into the autumn before he obtained a job collecting overdue bills for the Edison Company. Eventually, he worked his way into a law practice, but it never yielded satisfaction. In the meantime, amid his backbreaking struggles to get enough money with which to have leisure for writing, he gave rather free play to his inclination for womanly companionship, with no idea of marriage in mind. In the autobiography he lists in the Index under "love Affairs" the names of sixteen women. Three of these infatuations were doubly scandalous because they occurred after he had had children from his unhappy marriage. This is to say nothing of passing affairs with fellow boarders of rooming-houses and his occasional trips to brothels.<sup>1</sup>

This brief sketch, inadequate as it is, indicates fertile soil for Naturalistic growth. Masters grew up in an atmosphere wherein a rebellious spirit reinforced by free-thinking had ample space for expansion. The hardships of his family in the strict Puritan settlement whose members constantly bore down upon people having ideas and ideals such as he and his father entertained left a deep impression upon him. The petty bickering, political chicanery, and the rough, miserable life of Petersburg and Lewistown could

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<sup>1</sup>N.B.: these facts concerning Masters' life have been condensed from his autobiography: Edgar Lee Masters, Across Spoon River (Farrar and Reinhart, Inc., New York, 1936. Hereafter this book will be called "Autobiography."

not be erased from his mind. He saw hypocrisy and deceit in the professions and in the religious intolerance of the country-minded zelots. He was thrown into a profession for which he had no inclination, and he remained in it simply because he expected it to lift him to what he wanted, writing. From all of this came discouragement. Disillusion must have stared at him from every angle of his experience. Even his loose living did not satisfy his craving for happiness and for self-expression. All of these factors influenced his attitude which left definite Naturalistic marks upon his literary work.

Spoon River Anthology, published in 1915, is a collection of Masters' poems, each of which was written as an epitaph of one of the 244 inhabitants of Spoon River. The scene is laid in the village graveyard where the epitaphs dramatically call attention to the part this or that character played in village life. Here are revealed virtues, faults, and vices of the deceased who in some cases come to life while the reader passes among them and tell him the gossip about Spoon River and its people. In most instances there is little relation of one character with another, there being about nineteen connected stories amid this welter of individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Masters himself explains that the characters in the order of their appearance rank as, 1) fools, drunkards, failures; 2) people of one-track minds; 3) heroes and enlightened spirits.<sup>3</sup> From another viewpoint they have been classed as, 1) purely factual material with no explanations;

<sup>2</sup>Edgar Lee Masters, "The Genesis of Spoon River," American Mercury XXVIII (January, 1933), p. 50.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 50-51.

2) sketches that are ironic; 3) idealizations that show people breaking through obstacles to gain lives of satisfaction.<sup>4</sup> The style of free verse in which they are written is in imitation of the style of men like Whitman, Crane, and others.<sup>5</sup>

This plan of using records of the dead to tell their tales is not original with Masters. Crabbe used it in the "Parish Register" in which the reader turning the pages of the register opens up the histories of all the people of the parish. But Masters denied having read Crabbe. "As to Crabbe," he says, "when some reviewers saw a resemblance in the Anthology, I bought his poems and read them for the first time, never having looked into the old book at home. I didn't greatly like Crabbe and saw no kinship between myself and him."<sup>6</sup>

Although Masters could not see any similarity, Willard Wright,<sup>7</sup> who attacks the originality of Spoon River Anthology, finds a great parallel between Edwin A. Robinson and Masters. Wright maintains that Masters descends from Robinson just as Robinson comes from Crabbe. Amy Lowell<sup>8</sup> denies that Robinson has had any influence upon Masters because Masters was not familiar with the work of Robinson. Whatever the stages of progression, there is more than a superficial likeness of Masters to Crabbe. And the scheme on which the Anthology is constructed is in general the same as that used in

<sup>4</sup>Russell Blankenship, American Literature as an Expression of the National Mind (Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1931), p. 602.

<sup>5</sup>Masters, Autobiography, p. 336.

<sup>6</sup>Masters, "The Genesis of Spoon River," p. 43.

<sup>7</sup>Willard H. Wright, "Mr. Masters: 'S.R.A.': a Criticism," Forum, LV (Jan., 1916), p. 112f.

<sup>8</sup>Amy Lowell, Tendencies in Modern American Poetry (Houghton Mifflin Co., N.Y., 1926), p. 181.

Book VII of the Greek Anthology. Masters, however, passes over in silence the question of originality, leaving his reader to believe that the scheme sprang spontaneously from his idea of putting side by side characters each of whom could tell his own story.<sup>9</sup> Physical surroundings in the Anthology are those of a small Mid-West town at the end of the last century. Amy Lowell placed the village in Hanover, Illinois, along the Spoon River.<sup>10</sup> Masters denied writing about any particular town, for he had lived in Chicago for twenty years before he attempted to write the book.<sup>11</sup> But he drew upon familiar experiences to create the atmosphere of his story. His descriptions of some of the country on the outskirts of Lewistown are appropriate for the Anthology:

For more than five miles the road from Havana to Lewistown runs through the Spoon River bottoms, one of the most forbidding pieces of country that I know anything about. Jungle weeds crowd the banks of the river, overshadowed by huge cottonwood trees. The land about is fertile, but is much flooded, or was then. The farmhouses for the most part were ramshackle, some of them mere log houses. As it turned out, the people who lived here were wretchedly poor and drunken, some of them vicious and criminal . . . . The black flies bit the stage horses, and smells of dank weeds, dead fish, and green scum of drying pools smote our nostrils.<sup>12</sup>

Lewistown, a dismal place, probably not so dirty physically as the Borough, enjoyed little that would invite tourists. One commentator complains that

<sup>9</sup> Masters, Autobiography, p. 339.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>11</sup> David Karsner, Sixteen Authors to One (Louis Copeland, New York, 1928), p. 134.

<sup>12</sup> Masters, Autobiography, p. 52f.

the only thing memorable about the Anthology is that the reader has been introduced ". . . to a small town and its small houses and small inhabitants by a guide . . . through all the back yards and back alleys, past all the underestimated lives hidden within poor exteriors and the mean souls hiding behind a brave facade."<sup>13</sup>

Because of the way in which the separate poems of the Anthology all point towards characterizing individuals of the village, it is difficult to get any description of the locale from the Anthology. Only after reading the character sketches does one feel that he has a mental picture of the type of town, the industries, the places of political and social interest to these people. At no place does Masters attempt to describe the total scene or any section of the village, its streets, homes, or centers of activity. Occasionally, there are Romantic and idyllic phrases, but never is there any direct description of the setting.

Crabbe's Borough smelled of salt cakes heaped up along the seacoast and feebly resounded to shouts of fishermen and coarse language of rough sailors. Spoon River-village, bordering on a muddy stream, sickened with the languid pulse of a self-complacent community whose people wrangled over conflicting interests in politics, business, religion, and their own domestic affairs.

Persons in the setting need be mentioned only as groups that form the Realistic background, since specific characters will be analyzed in the

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<sup>13</sup>Robert Littel, The New Spoon River (Harcourt, Brace, and Co., New York, 1926), p. 189.



following chapter.

Masters' men and women represent a broad section of village life. There are politicians whose machinations set the tone of village life, such as "Henry C. Goodhue," "Editor Whedon," and "Nicholas Bindle." Doctors and lawyers, some of them good men, others bad, are symbolized in the characters of "Dr. Meyers," "Doc Hill," "Kinsey Keene," "Benjamin Pantier," and "Judge Selah Lively." The Bankers were powerful forces playing off now one faction, now another in village politics, the leader being "Thomas Rhodes." The newspaper business was dominated by Editor Whedon and his clique. Country yokels and simpletons ranged from those who tried to memorize the encyclopedia to others who blew off their hands with firearms, or lay under tombstones, victims of epitaphs that failed to reflect their true character. Some of these people were "Frank Drummer," "Percy Bysshe Shelley," "Charlie French," "Jonas Keene," and "Cassius Hueffer." Disillusioned creatures who had failed in life moaned about their sad state: "Flossie Cabanis," "Zenas Witt," and "Margaret Fuller Slack." Here in the village are murderers, such as "Jack Maguire," "Hod Putt," "Barry Holden"; suicides, like "Harold Arnett," and "Julia Miller"; drunkards, cheats of various kinds, and loose women prowled about the streets: "Chase Henry," "Herbert Marshall," "Aner Clute," and "Daisy Frazer."<sup>14</sup>

Had Masters chosen to synthesize the various sketches of the Anthology into a brief but Realistic paragraph, he could not have done better than to use his own description of Lewistown and its people. The following paragraph

<sup>14</sup>N.B.: the foregoing examples are not all-inclusive but only representative.

in his own words is quite appropriate for the Anthology:

I can see in my mind's eye the people who used to go about the streets of Lewistown on Saturdays, coming from Spoon River bottoms: men with sore eyes from syphilis, blinking the light; men with guns or slings in their pockets, carrying whips, and fouling the sidewalks with tobacco spit; women dressed in faded calicoes twisted about their shapeless bodies . . . . These creatures at Lewistown howled in their insane cups, they fought with knives and guns and knucks. The streets stank. The shopkeepers stood in their doorways eyeing chances of trade; they walked back and forth behind their counters, serving the malodorous riff-raff that came from the bottoms.<sup>15</sup>

Occasionally, the setting is brightened by a small percentage of the people who rise above the customary smallmindedness and show noble sentiments, but even these reflect the Realistic viewpoint. In the main, the people in their location are very materialistic minded and have a limited outlook on life.

Larger problems that entered the lives of the people of Spoon River centered around social and political issues, one of which was prohibition. Prominent figures in this were "The Town Marshall," "Jack Maguire," and "George Trimble." Straight-laced Puritans waged a continual battle against the "curse" of prohibition. These enthusiasts made religion a more fundamental issue since it was at the basis of their rigorism. Some of the figures in this conflict were "Wendall P. Bloyd," "Yee Bow," and "Willard Fluke." Scandal was attached to conniving of Rhodes and Whedon whose power enabled them to make a success or ruination of any project, be it water-

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<sup>15</sup>Masters, Autobiography, p. 41of.

works, opera house, or new courthouse. "Nicholas Bindle," "John M. Church," "Adam Weirauch," and "Eugene Carman" figured in one or other of these. Liberty and freedom were issues tossed about by both factions in a manner reminiscent of Masters' personal experience in Lewistown and Petersburg. Freedom of the senses and man's animal nature had a place in "Jacob Godbey." "John Hancock Otis" symbolized freedom of enterprise. In "John Cabanis" there is opposition to freedom and democratic rule. "Roger Heston" is an example which shows that Masters dallied with the problem of free will. Much of the materialism that dominates the setting in the Anthology derives from the spirit of free-thinking that went on in Masters' villages of Lewistown and Petersburg during the incumbency of the liberals. Lewistown presented the prototype that Masters used.

. . . Lewistown was an organized microcosm, and the best that I have ever known. If there was a type of man, a kind of interest, a phase of politics, a programme or tick of finance, a tangle or a tragedy of the courts, an agitation in the theology or church ambition -- anything in the great world which did not have its homologue in Lewistown I do not know what it was.<sup>16</sup>

On the domestic side of life there were family quarrels like those of "Barry Holden" and "Mrs. Charles Bliss" over divorce. Flirtations and escapades that sometimes brought happy marriage, sometimes only misery are found in cases like "Margaret Fuller Slack," the adulteror; "Willard Fluke"; the gay mistress, "Russian Sonia"; the lover easily swayed by a girl's willingness to practice free love, "Daniel M'Cumber." There are tragedies grow-

<sup>16</sup>Masters, "The Genesis of Spoon River," p. 45.

ing out of unhappy marriages and deceits in love like that of "Elsa Wertman" who allowed her illegitimate son to be adopted while she looked on, watching him bring glory, in his ignorance, to his adopting parents. There was the conscientious minister, "Amos Sibley," who tried every means of making a living to provide security for the time when his divorce from his adulterous wife would cost him his ministerial office.

A summary of this section reveals that there are some differences in the setting of the Borough and of the Anthology. In the former there is a condition in which people toil with greater misery arising from physical dirt; in the latter the dirt is moral, and the reader is more conscious of people immersed in it. The creatures of the Anthology reveal more mental anguish and pangs of conscience. The problems they encounter are more diversified, bristling with layer upon layer of fact. Masters also spends more time with the passions of love and of hate, and he parades "sex" before his audience so convincingly that one feels that he himself is obsessed with it. Without having yet considered the method of the poet, one can see from these observations concerning the setting that Masters manifests a leaning towards Naturalism.

Characteristic of the Naturalist's method of handling his material is that his style is photographic, journalistic, analytical, and coarse. These features are better appreciated after a general impression of the work as a whole is enjoyed. Because of the brevity of each poem, it is difficult to single out instances; nevertheless, the total impression, which is quite compelling, actually comes from qualities that individual poems contain.

Therefore, an example of each type can be offered, followed by references to similar features in other poems.

The aim of a photographic style is to reproduce the object in its true colors and dimensions. When this is carried to the extent to which the Naturalists go, it may become merely a startling array of countless facts, confused and often irrelevant. Masters typifies a man with a hunger for secrets of human behavior, a hunger that is microscopic in presence of human sufferings, despair, and foolish illusions.<sup>17</sup> And this is fed by a motive that smacks of curiosity, rather than of desire for beauty. The following poem is photographic in its account of this man's catastrophe and in words like "blow-fires," "rickety ladder," "couple of eggs," and "smoldering irons":

After I got religion and steadied down  
 They gave me a job in the canning works,  
 And every morning I had to fill  
 The tank in the yeard with gasoline,  
 That fed the flow-fires in the sheds  
 To heat the smoldering irons.  
 And I mounted a rickety ladder to do it,  
 Carrying buckets full of the stuff.  
 One morning as I stood there pouring,  
 The air gew still and seemed to heave,  
 And I shot up as the tank exploded,  
 And down I came with both legs broken,  
 And my eyes burned crisp as a couple of eggs.  
 For someone left a blow-fire going,  
 And something sucked the flame in the tank.  
 The Circuit Judge said whoever did it  
 Was a fellow-servant of mine, and so  
 Old Rhodes' son didn't have to pay me.  
 And I sat on the witness stand as blind

<sup>17</sup>Conrad Aiken, Scepticisms, Notes on Contemporary Poetry (A. A. Knopf, New York, 1919), p. 70.

As Jack the Fiddler, saying over and over,  
 "I didn't know him at all."

("'Butch' Weldy," p. 26)<sup>18</sup>

Similar examples of this photographic characteristic are found in "Mrs. Meritt," "Zilpha Marsh," and "Le Roy Goldman."

Masters' style has a journalistic touch that makes the most of a surprise beginning, a rapid recounting of facts, and a finish that reins in the reader with something of a jolt. This poem is in a newspaper style:

I was sick, but more than that, I was mad  
 At the crooked police, and the crooked game of life,  
 So I wrote to the Chief of Police at Peoria:  
 "I am here in my girlhood home in Spoon River,  
 Gradually wasting away.  
 But come and take me, I killed the son  
 Of the merchant prince, in Madam Lou's,  
 And the papers that said he killed himself  
 In his home while cleaning a hunting gun --  
 Lied like the devil to hush up scandal,  
 For the bribe of advertising.  
 In my room I shot him, at Madam Lou's,  
 Because he knocked me down when I said  
 I'd see my lover that night."

("Rosie Roberts," p. 140)

Other examples of this journalistic method are "Robert Fulton Tanner," and "Hod Put."

An analyst probes into secrets of nature revealing scientific methods. Masters generally analyzes human actions or mental processes leaving some suggestion of scientific treatment. In this next poem, Masters is dealing with a case bordering on insanity. He also touches upon the notion of

<sup>18</sup>Edgar Lee Masters, Spoon River Anthology (revised edition, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1944) p. 26. N.B.: titles of poems and page references used hereafter refer to the Anthology.

materialism and shows the reactions of a person who felt that he was a part of matter.

I was Willie Metcalf.  
 They used to call me "Doctor Meyers"  
 Because, they said, I looked like him.  
 And he was my father, according to Jack Maguire.  
 I lived in the livery stable,  
 Sleeping on the floor  
 Side by side with Roger Baughman's bulldog,  
 Or sometimes in a stall.  
 I could crawl between the legs of the wildest horses  
 Without getting kicked -- we knew each other.  
 On spring days I tramped through the country  
 To get the feeling, which I sometimes lost,  
 That I was not a separate thing from the earth.  
 I used to lose myself, as if in sleep,  
 By lying with eyes half-open in the woods.  
 Sometimes I talked with animals -- even toads and snakes --  
 Anything that had an eye to look into.  
 Once I saw a stone in the sunshine  
 Trying to turn into jelly;  
 In April days in this cemetery  
 The dead people gathered all about me,  
 And grew still, like a congregation in silent prayer.  
 I never knew whether I was a part of the earth  
 With flowers growing in me, or whether I walked --  
 Now I know.

("Willie Metcalf," p. 247)

Further evidences of analytical method can be studied in "Archibald Higbie,"  
 "John Ballard," and "The Village Atheist,"

Coarseness, crudeness, overemphasis of unusual details, and lack of  
 selection which Masters exhibits is very Naturalistic. The blasphemy and  
 impudence of the following poem are astonishing:

They first charged me with disorderly conduct,  
 There being no statute on blasphemy.  
 Later they locked me up as insane  
 Where I was beaten to death by a Catholic guard.  
 My offense was this:  
 I said God lied to Adam, and destined him  
 To lead the life of a fool,

Ignorant that there is evil in the world as well  
 as good.  
 And when Adam outwitted God by eating the apple  
 And saw through the lie,  
 God drove him out of Eden to keep him from taking  
 The fruit of immortal life.  
 For Christ's sake, you sensible people,  
 Here's what God Himself says about it in the book  
 of Genesis:

"And the Lord God said, behold the man  
 Is become as one of us" (a little envy, you see),  
 "To know good and evil" (The all-is-good lie ex-  
 posed):

"And now lest he put forth his hand and take  
 Also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever:  
 Therefore the Lord God sent Him forth from the  
 garden of Eden."

(The reason I believe God crucified His Own Son  
 To get out of the wretched tangle is, because it  
 sounds just like Him.)

("Wendall P. Bloyd," p. 81)

Poor taste and lack of discrimination, to say nothing of irreverence for the  
 Divinity, is a charge that can easily be proved in Masters' case. Resting  
 in the bosom of eternity, his characters, lacking reverence for the sacred-  
 ness of death, instead curse and complain about God and their fellowmen,  
 exposing one another like devils in hell. Coarseness runs through poems  
 like "'Indignation' Jones" in which one corpse calls his dead companions,  
 "white trash." It comes forth too often with reference to sexual implica-  
 tions like those in "Amanda Barker." It even creeps out with innocent young  
 girls as the victims. Here is one case in point:

I was only eight years old;  
 And before I grew up and knew what it meant  
 I had no words for it, except  
 That I was frightened and told my Mother;

("Nellie Clark," p. 62)

The infamous Editor Whedon has a "choice" spot in the cemetery, one of



Masters' scarce descriptions of the cemetery, and it is quite disgusting.

Then to lie here close by the river over the place  
Where the sewage flows from the village,  
And the empty cans and garbage are dumped,  
And abortions are hidden.

("Editor Whedon," p. 132)

Amy Lowell<sup>19</sup> has an appropriate observation to make on objectionable matter, such as that found in the selection just quoted. She remarks that the Anthology contains everything that is coarse in sexual life.

These excerpts of Masters just quoted are representative of many passages and entire poems in the Anthology. Deservedly it has been said: "It was the scandal and not the poetry of Spoon River, criticism may suspect, which particularly spread its fame."<sup>20</sup> Even Conrad Aiken<sup>21</sup> felt that about one-third of the book should have been deleted. If this were done, it might still be questioned whether the other two-thirds would give a true picture of life.<sup>22</sup>

This chapter concerning the setting in the Anthology considered briefly the life of Edgar Lee Masters insofar as it helps to explain his literary work. Rebellious forces in his character mingled with the strange environment of free-thinking and disappointment that followed Masters late into life. The expression of all of this came with the publishing of the Anthology

<sup>19</sup>Lowell, p. 175.

<sup>20</sup>Carl C. Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists, 1900-1920 (The Macmillan Co., New York, 1922), p. 149.

<sup>21</sup>Aiken, p. 73.

<sup>22</sup>Henry Van Dyke, The Man behind the Book: Essays in Understanding (Scribners' Sons, New York, 1929), pp. 104-05.

in 1915. The book is a character study of 244 members of the community who reveal themselves through the epitaphs written over their graves.

Physical Realism of the setting was viewed under the divisions of place, persons, and problems. Just as in the case with Crabbe, surroundings reflect the atmosphere of the small town in which Masters grew up. Persons are chiefly types that Masters knew in the village and those he met later in Chicago. The problems are the usual political and social issues bitterly contested by the "Law-and-Order" faction and the liberals. Domestic conflicts cover the seven deadly sins and one or other of the virtues. In each classification, the differences between Crabbe and Masters are those of degree. In Masters, the pattern of village life has to be filled in to a large extent by the imagination. The character sketches indicate that there is less physical but more moral uncleanness in the Anthology. Crabbe's people are more destitute and more miserable in their poverty. More characters of Masters turn upon Psychological Realism, for each one in some way searches out reasons or explanations for his course of life, but they are not so convincing and masterful as those of Crabbe. Problems of the people in the Anthology are commercialized and center about intimate questions of private life. Masters boldly exposes the passions of sex and of love, and he dwells suspiciously on details concerning them. These differences mark Masters as a Naturalist whose scope of treatment extends beyond that of the Realist.

The method by which Masters presents his locality, characters and problems is Naturalistic. He has a photographic touch that reveals factual-

ly and less colorfully the causes of complaints of his people. He exposes them more cruelly than Crabbe does when he lifts the veil from, "Each lovely charm, each mole and wrinkle too!" His journalistic style in collecting facts and in abruptly and strikingly reporting them, outdoes anything that Crabbe has in the Borough. As to analysis of details, motives, reasons, and facts, Masters sounds like the court lawyer who is striking out for information, asking relevant and irrelevant questions to build up a large store of facts. And on the topic of selectivity, Masters goes beyond the limits Crabbe set for himself, and he remains in forbidden territory for a long time, indulging in animal passions and taking liberties that bespeak careless judgment and poor taste. In each of these four aspects of style, Masters' method is Naturalistic.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NATURALISTIC CHARACTERIZATION IN THE SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY

One has only to glance at the "Contents" of the Anthology to realize that this book is a collection of character sketches. In all, the 244 individual poems represent the members of the community who comment on their lives, explaining their deaths and exposing their neighbors as well as community enterprises. From the separate poems and the references made to characters of other poems, the story of Spoon River village is created. Since each poem, on the average, is only about eighteen lines in length, however, there is scant matter from which to judge the characters and their place in the life of Spoon River.

Many of these characters and their peculiar setting are so alarming that one wonders whether they reflect the prevailing atmosphere of the entire settlement. It is difficult to believe that even a small town of the caliber of Spoon River with its unimpressive personalities would have so many disgruntled inhabitants. It is also dubious whether the book gives a true picture of what mankind thinks, or would like to think, goes on inside the walls of a cemetery. Non-Christians reverence the dead as "sleeping." But Masters' departed souls derive little rest from their slumber. Christians believe that their dead have gone to reckon with their Creator. In their minds, then, a cemetery fittingly suggests sentiments like sorrow, penance, and reparation, none of which are very prominent in the Anthology. Here, the prevailing spirit is one of dissatisfaction with self and with others,

certainly not one of faith in the mercy of God. This tendency to single out an unusual group of villagers that shocks the public is in keeping with the bold presentation of the Naturalistic writer.

It has to be borne in mind that not all characters in the Anthology but only a limited number that manifest traits under consideration will be part of this present study. Since the objective in this part of the paper is to note Naturalistic characteristics in the Anthology and to draw comparisons with the Realistic ones in the Borough, a full catalogue of all characters is neither necessary nor desirable. The same general procedure is to be followed that was used in analyzing Crabbe's characters. In doing this, certain names recur more than once to demonstrate different qualities of character. This has advantages over choosing another character to explain each different point. Familiarity with the same names will decrease the reader's burden and further use of the same character to illustrate another characteristic should throw greater light upon that character.

The simple characters in the Anthology are not much different from those in the Borough. Among people of some civic distinction is the foppish rogue whose money helped him to play an influential part in the village life.

When my moustache curled,  
 And my hair was black,  
 And I wore tight trousers  
 And a diamond stud,  
 I was an excellent knave of hearts and  
     took many a trick.  
 But when the grayhairs began to appear --  
 Lo! a new generation of girls  
 Laughed at me, not fearing me,  
 And I had no more exciting adventures  
 Wherein I was all but shot for a heartless devil,  
     devil,

("Lucius Atherton." p. 56. ll. 1-10)

One of the congressmen never realized until death that his young wife actually hated him and was about to marry Willard Shafer, a weight lifter.

It never came into my mind  
Until I was ready to die  
That Jenny had loved me to death, with malice  
of heart.

For I was seventy, she was thirty-five,  
And I wore myself to a shadow trying to husband  
Jenny, rosy Jenny full of the ardor of life.

.....  
So Jenny inherited my fortune and married Willard --  
That mount of brawn! That clownish soul!

("Hon. Henry Bennett," p. 66, ll. 1-6; 13-14)

The last two verses are characteristic of the manner in which Masters' dissatisfied wretches often retaliate at the end of a poem. One of the village doctors was a simple, helpful soul.

I went up and down the streets  
Here and there by day and night,  
Through all hours of the night caring for the poor  
who were sick.

Do you know why?  
My wife hated me, my son went to the dogs.  
And I turned to the people and poured out my love  
to them.

("Doc Hill," p. 32, ll. 1-6)

Simple characters without renown in Spoon River are like the druggist whose familiarity with mixing chemicals and observation of friction in the Pantier household warned him against matrimony.

I Trainor, the druggist, a mixer of chemicals,  
Killed while make an experiment,  
Lived unwedded.

("Trainor the Druggist," p. 19, ll. 11-13)

A clothier speaks with disdain as he comments on his unfortunate plight.

If the excursion train to Peoria  
Had just been wrecked, I might have escaped with  
my life --

Certainly I should have escaped this place.  
 But as it was burned as well, they mistook me  
 For John Allen who was sent to the Hebrew Cemetery  
 At Chicago,  
 And John for me, so I lie here.  
 It was bad enough to run a clothing store in this  
     town,  
 But to be buried here -- ach!

("Barney Hainsfeather," p. 88)

The disappointment of people committed to a resting place in Spoon River is very common in the Anthology. It is noteworthy also that most of the buried ones have not died natural deaths. There is violence during life even up to the end; and the psychological Realism of Masters, while it dwells upon reasons and motives for action, always leaves the impression that mere facts and actions are more important in Masters' mind. This is true of the selection just cited.

A comparison of simple characters shows that Crabbe's are more developed. Among the more dignified simple people there is greater similarity: Sir Denys was an upstart Mayor and Lucius Atherton, an elderly "playboy" whose increasing marks of old age lost for him the pretty young women; the diffident Curate and Doc Hill who turned from miserable home conditions to his patients for solace. As to his actors, Cynthia, Peter Nottage, and Neddy, Crabbe has nothing like the jolt of surprise, the disdain, and bickering that is found in Masters. All of these simple characters of Masters have an unpoetic, matter-of-fact appearance about them.

Complex characters in the Anthology are not so complex as those in the Borough, chiefly because Masters does not possess the skill to portray them and also because there is such little plot and action in situations in which

they are involved. In Masters poems there are, however, more examples of characters whose actions are somewhat obscure. Among the individuals some characterizations are good, but others are very artificial.<sup>1</sup> A strong personage was Lucinda Matlock who at the age of sixty had lost eight of her twelve children. At ninety-six, without any complaining she was ready to die, but she chastized from her grave those younger people who were finding life hard to face.

What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,  
 Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?  
 Degenerate sons and daughters,  
 Life is too strong for you --  
 It takes life to love life.

("Lucinda Matlock," p. 229, ll. 18-22)

This old lady suffered the evils of Spoon River many years, but she rose nobly above the carping mob of discontented villagers. In her lofty idealism she represents a small number of characters who are not indicative of the grumblings and undertone of the people.

Thomas Rhodes towered above the other leaders of the village because he owned the Bank, a large merchandise mart, and was senior deacon in the church. He determined the village policy, dominating social and political life with the aid of his friend, Editor Whedon. To make a public example of Fawcett, a poor clerk in his store, Rhodes promised him mercy if he confessed his theft of a few blankets, stolen from the store. Fawcett did so, but he was ruined by Rhodes who exposed him mercilessly in the newspapers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Edward B. Reed, Review of Spoon River Anthology, Yale Review, new series, V (January, 1916), p. 424.

<sup>2</sup>"Clarence Fawcett," p. 135.



Editor Whedon, his boon companion, reflected his own crafty, double-dealing nature in his epitaph.

To pervert the truth, to ride it for a purpose,  
To use great feelings and passions of the human  
family

For base designs, for cunning ends,

. . . . .  
To scratch dirt over scandal for money,  
And exhume it to the winds for revenge,  
Or to sell papers,  
Crushing reputations, or bodies, if need be,  
To win at any cost, save your own life.

("Editor Whedon," p. 131. ll. 3-5; 13-17)

Study of Masters' psychological characters reveals a marked contrast with those of Crabbe. Masters analyzes, searches for reasons and causes, but he does not get inside the mind of his characters convincingly. One never feels that he is dealing with the mental operations of a man. It is facts and data in his work that stand out like news items. He seems to be turning pages in a book of records, snatching out salient details, often of a startling kind, throwing them before the reader nakedly. He misses completely the tragic emotions of fear and pity that Crabbe has power over.

Some evidences of psychological reflection are apparent, but they indicate no progressive ruin of the soul, no advance in the decay that leads to their doom. They only mark a few details that made these people what they now are. Almost all of the murderers and suicides are responsible for their own destruction in Spoon River. Even the men and women of loose life admit that they are at fault. Failures confess that they never had the drive to make anything of themselves.

Benjamin Pantier<sup>3</sup> is a psychological character whose true life is told in the epitaph of his wife, Mrs. Pantier. People thought she had snared his soul and bled him to death. Mrs. Pantier unfolds the other side of his character.

But suppose you are really a lady, and have delicate  
tastes,  
And loathe the smell of whiskey and onions.  
.....  
And then, suppose:  
You are a woman well endowed,  
And the only man with whom the law and morality  
Permit you to have the marital relation  
Is the very man that fills you with disgust  
Every time you think of it -- while you think of  
it  
Every time you see him?  
("Mrs. Benjamin Pantier," p. 16, ll. 5-6; 11-17)

The Naturalistic pen is apparent here in words like "smell of whiskey and onions" and in the reference to Mrs. Pantier's marital relations.

Adam Weirauch lost his meat packing-house on account of unfair competition. After other failures he succeeded in being elected to the legislature. The journalistic style is noteworthy in this:

I said to hell with principle and sold my vote  
On Charles T. Yerkes' street-car franchise.  
Of course, I was one of the fellows they caught.  
Who was it, Armour, Altgeld, or myself  
That ruined me?  
("Adam Weirauch," p. 120, ll. 15-19)

Eugene Carman, a poor clerk in Rhodes' store for twenty years, suddenly flew into a fit of rage at his insignificant position and broke a blood vessel in his brain with his violent outburst. He said:

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<sup>3</sup>"Benjamin Pantier," p. 15.

So I cursed and cursed: You damned old thing!  
You cowardly dog! You rotten pauper!  
You Rhodes slave!

("Eugene Carman," pp. 133-34; ll. 16-18)

The contrast in complex individuals of Crabbe and Masters is exhibited in the characters studied: Ellen Orford is an ideal person and yet her tragic experiences keep her on the Realistic plane; Lucinda Matlock, noble in conception, lacks inspiration and emotion; Swallow was a crafty individual, but Rhodes and Editor Whedon, both of them influential and bluntly treacherous, lack flesh and blood.

Psychological characters of Masters are very superficial, cardboard embodiments of some principle or idea. They do not carry conviction in their revelation of motives or explanation of actions. They sound like newspaper accounts, nothing more. This is so because they lack emotion and have not the tragic atmosphere to help to create a truly psychological situation. They are superficial also because there is no dwelling upon weakness of character, no reflection upon current misery and future suffering that is impending. Such is so in the cases of the examples discussed; Benjamin Pantier, Adam Weirauch, Eugene Carman. In Grimes, Blaney, Clelia, however, there is reflection. They stand out as men and women who feel deeply their misery. Thinking upon its causes as well as the inevitable ruin of their lives makes them more real and reveals to the reader psychological stages in their gradual wearing down.

Another classification of characters can be made according to moral position or status. In this grouping the characters are soiled, ordinary or indifferent, and noble. This division lends itself well to a treatment

of Masters' people because morality plays an important part in their characterizations.

Tainted or soiled characters are far greater in number and in variety in Masters' poems. He demonstrates in this regard the Naturalistic approach to evil insofar as he probes into almost every field of sinful activity and exaggerates the proportion between good and evil in the lives of people. Another effect of Naturalistic treatment is the cruel manner in which many of his murders are carried out. Barry Holden (p. 79) killed his wife with a hatchet; Searcy Foote (p. 157) smothered his aged aunt with chloroform; Tom Merritt (p. 195) was shot to death by his wife's lover who chose to shoot first lest he be shot himself.

In all but a few of the characters there is little of respect or of the time-honored reverence for the dead. In only a few cases, the noblest characters in Spoon River, is there any semblance of the fitting disposition for forgiveness and mercy that is expected of sinners. Reference has been made to backbiting and carping of individuals who have a grudge against someone or something in their lives. This spirit could be understood as a symbol of the undeniable guilt of these tainted souls if they alone were guilty of complaining. Complaining is not peculiar to the great sinners. Even the inconsequential and trivial characters register the same marks of impropriety.

The great number of Masters' characters who close their life stories on a note of materialism is remarkable. The sorrow they express is for some material loss, or it is a sigh for some pleasure. Everything is grounded on a purely natural plane of existence. There is no interest in a spiritual

afterlife that is personal; consequently, no time is spent in their fretting over whether they are saved or not. Johnnie Sayre (p. 38) expresses sorrow for having disobeyed his father. Dorcas Gustine (p. 44) thought it better to bring into the open the cause of trouble than to allow silence to poison the soul. He started a fight that proved fatal, but he felt no sorrow for the consequences. Jack Maguire (p. 43) was sentenced to fourteen years for killing the town marshal who had called him a drunken hound and struck him, but he served his term "And learned to read and write." Benjamin Fraser (p. 21) calls attention to the nature of the place he came to after death.

I came to this wingless void,  
Where neither red, nor gold, nor wine,  
Nor the rhythm of life is known.  
("Benjamin Fraser," p. 21, ll. 21-23)

Daisy Fraser (p. 20), a prostitute, complains about having to pay ten dollars every time she is hauled before the Justice. The last words in the epitaph of Deacon Taylor (p. 58) were taken from the bottle whose contents killed him, "spiritus frumenti." Fiddler Jones (p. 61) died with not a single regret. Hon Bennett (p. 66) died with a curse on his lips for the man who married his widow, Jenny. The town drunkard, Chase Henry (p. 11) shows that honor in the next life is returned in exchange for a life of shame here on earth. In characters of this kind there is utter disregard for the only important fact for those who have died, namely, that there is a personal existence after death and that they figure in it.

So much for the characters of tainted or soiled nature. Those that are indifferent and the victims of fate have been placed in the moral scale

only because they fit in between the blameworthy and the praiseworthy creatures. Masters included in the Anthology a large number of those kinds of persons who are just ordinary people with ordinary problems. The Naturalistic style is noteworthy in these kinds of characters, that is, the photographic, journalistic, analytical, and crude manner of handling materials.

Flossie Cabanis (p. 36) came home, a failure, after an unsuccessful attempt on the stage. Zenas Will (p. 40) tells in a journalistic fashion of his succumbing to fear of diseases about which he had read in Dr. Weese's advertisements. Margaret Fuller Slack, faced with the problem of celibacy, matrimony, or unchastity, chose the state of marriage, but she complains bitterly of not having leisure to write her novel.

It was all over with me, anyway,  
When I ran the needle in my hand  
While washing the baby's things,  
And died from lock-jaw, an ironical death.  
Hear me, ambitious souls,  
Sex is the curse of life!

("Margaret Fuller Slack," p. 48, ll. 12-17)

Foolish souls have their place in Spoon River also. Frank Drummer (p. 29) went to prison at the age of twenty-five, cut short in his resolve to memorize the Encyclopedia Britannica! Shelley wasted his student life and accidentally shot himself (p. 35). Jonas Keene (p. 33) climbed into bed with wet clothes and died because he was so ashamed of his useless boys and girls. Cassius Hueffer (p. 7) lies under an epitaph which falsely credits him with qualities of a "man." These accounts of the village fools are typical newspaper stories filled with small analytical, commonplace details.

Along with this group of indifferent souls it is appropriate to consider victims of circumstances and of fate. Judge Somers (p. 13) cannot understand how Chase, the town drunkard, merits a marble urn with a weed growing in it while he, a learned lawyer, rests unmarked and unidentified. "Indignation" Jones (p. 23) lived a run-down existence with his slovenly wife and blind daughter Minerva. Minerva Jones (p. 22), vulgarly described by Masters as the village poetess whom everyone jeered and hooted at, was victimized by "Butch" Weldy and died in Doctor Meyers' office in which she had sought help. Doctor Meyers (p. 24) had lived a good life, but he was blamed for Minerva's death when he tried to help her after her moral lapse. "Butch" Weldy (p. 26) finally settled down after "getting religion" and lost his eyes and legs in a gasoline explosion.

According to the moral classification in which the sullied souls and indifferent characters have just been treated, there remain noble and honorable men and women. Due to the necessary brevity of treatment of these characters and the fact that they occur generally only once in the Anthology, they are much more difficult to analyze than those of Crabbe.

One critic who has made a very sensible criticism of the Anthology lists eight characters who, he claims, have lived and on account of whom Masters is a poet because they show a shrewdness, a dramatic power, love of nature, and sympathy with life that is admirable. It is true that all of the characters cited by the author are noble in this sense. The writer, however, has chosen a few other noble people because they exhibit more principle in their characters -- the stuff that dominates life and creates character.

How Reed could fail to include in his group of select persons Lois Spears is surprising. The poem has everything in it that Mr. Reed asks for. Lois had been born blind. She lived a model life with her family of healthy children, making her home a place of order and hospitality. No blemishes mar her path through life and she closes her epitaph with the finest tribute that comes from the mouth of any character in the entire Anthology, "Glory to God in the highest." Indeed, were it not for the matter-of-fact recounting of household work, the poem would not even be Realistic.

But the question naturally arises: Why treat "noble" character in a study of characterization according to Naturalism? What place do high-minded, upright, uncomplaining mortals have in a world of cynicism and discontent? The answer is that these lofty characters are Naturalistic if they believe that the world can thrive on materialistic principles alone; if they shun authority, faith, and the beliefs of preceding decades that have been approved as part of the code of good living; if they become so "modern" as to relish the position of revolutionist, liberator, and so-called emancipator; if they are revealed in a searching, analytical, and scientific picture that welcomes a plethora of unnecessary details, often too photographic and too crude for wholesome enjoyment and literary taste. Noble characters of Masters all create an impression that has its roots in some one of the features of Naturalism just mentioned. A few examples will demonstrate this.



Attention is called in the following poem to the Naturalistic implications in such words as, "wavering faith"; "drifting hope"; "unforgiven sins"; the implication in Father Malloy's being related to a great past and "yet" so close to the villagers in his being "not ashamed of the flesh."

You are over there, Father Malloy,  
 Where holy ground is, and the cross marks every  
 grave,  
 Not here with us on the hill --  
 Us of wavering faith, and clouded vision  
 And drifting hope, and unforgiven sins.  
 You were so human, Father Malloy,  
 Taking a friendly glass sometimes with us,  
 Siding with us who would rescue Spoon River  
 From the coldness and the dreariness of village  
 morality.  
 You were like a traveler who brings a little box  
 of sand  
 From the wastes about the pyramids  
 And makes them real and Egypt real.  
 You were a part of and related to a great past,  
 And yet you were so close to many of us.  
 You believed in the joy of life.  
 You did not seem to be ashamed of the flesh.  
 You faced life as it is,  
 And as it changes.  
 Some of us almost came to you, Father Malloy,  
 Seeing how your church has divined the heart,  
 And provided for it,  
 Through Peter the Flame,  
 Peter the Rock.

("Father Malloy," p. 202)

Although Father Malloy is acknowledged as different from other persons, still precisely wherein lies that difference and how the priestly character leaves its spiritual imprint upon him is lost completely in the mere bonhomme qualities and the spirit of tradition that Masters sees in the priest.

Elsa Wertman shows magnanimity of soul as she weeps with mingled pride and resignation under the spell of the eloquence of Hamilton Greene, knowing

that the boy is her own son born out of wedlock and adopted by his father and the woman who was not his mother. But there is unnecessary detail in account of the seduction and crudeness in laying forth the facts of this case. Elsa says:

He stole into the kitchen and took me  
 Right in his arms and kissed me on my throat,  
 I turning my head. Then neither of us  
 Seemed to know what happened.  
 And I cried for what would become of me.  
 And cried and cried as my secret began to show.

Mrs. Greene was given a farm to keep her quiet about her husband's infidelity, and

So she hid in the house and sent out rumors,  
 As if it were going to happen to her.  
 ("Elsa Wertman," p. 114, ll. 5-10; 15-16)

Mrs. Purkapile knew that her husband's story about being captured by pirates at VanBuren Street on Lake Michigan was only a blind for his leaving home to be free to spend more time unmolested with Mrs. Williams, the milliner. His wife refused to break her marriage vows simply because he had tired of his vow and his duty.

And out of respect for my own character  
 I refused to be drawn into a divorce  
 ("Mrs. Purkapile," p. 143, ll. 11-12)

This shows a high regard for marriage even if it is somewhat selfish. The treatment, nevertheless, is Naturalistic in detail as well as in the journalistic style in which the story is related.

Noble as some of Masters' characters are, they are only a few among hundreds that are quite otherwise. Granted a certain loftiness about these, they possess sufficient traces to characterize them as Naturalistic, at

least, in Masters' manner of delineation.

Another point on which Masters' characters must be analyzed is that of good character development. The question is: Are Masters' characters clearcut, consistent, and true to life?

Reed, who found eight characters that he feels entitle Masters to distinction, called the Anthology "exasperating because of its unevenness. "Some of the characters," he said, "are clearcut and convincing to such a degree that we know they must have been taken from life; others are artificial, as Yee Bow . . ." <sup>6</sup> Masters, no doubt, had in mind the nurse Jane who had assisted him through a serious illness over a period of three months, when he wrote "Paul McNeeley." In this poem there is a twofold revelation of kindness, sympathy, and human understanding on the part of Paul (Masters himself) and of Jane. But there is nothing specific about either of these characters, nothing very tangible to mark them off from other kind souls who find mutual interests.

There are no finely drawn, sharp-featured Vicars, Curates, or Orfords in the Anthology. Among the characters studied in this chapter already, none of them are actually clearcut. To take up the various classes, the murderers Barry Holden, Searcy Foote, and Tom Merritt have few individuating notes about them. Rhodes, Whedon, and Atherton symbolize power and treachery, but they do not stand out as people recognizable on the street. Daisy Frazer, Flossie Cabanis, and Margaret Fuller Slack represent women of ill-repute, but they are indistinct substitutes for the harlots they represent. The nondescript

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<sup>6</sup>Reed, p. 425.

characters like Barney Hainsfeather, Trainor the Druggist, Zenas Witt, and Frank Drum are not convincing personages at all. Even the noble characters like Father Malloy, Mrs. Purkapile, and Elsa Wertman are rather embodiments of an idea, clothed with but a few pertinent facts, not distinct persons. Lois Spears, the blind woman, was a dutiful housekeeper who bore her cross patiently and profitably, but she too is not unmistakable even as a housewife.

The quality of Masters' people as characters is severely but truthfully disclosed by Robert Little who says:

We remember the expedition, and its desperately honest, saltless aftertaste, but we don't remember any of the individuals. Their faces less distinct than the gossip, detective work, and idealistic generalizations in which they swam have long since disappeared. The talk about "a mirade of veracious characterization" was nonsense. There was no gallery of characters. There were no characters, and what we mistook for such were case histories in the clinic of life's hospital, with Mr. Masters as surgeon rather than artist . . .

And he adds: ". . . his words, his people, his creation, fade rapidly away."<sup>7</sup>

The "Rev. Lemuel Wiley" reads almost like a newspaper advertisement.

I preached four thousand sermons,  
 I conducted forty revivals,  
 And baptized many converts.  
 Yet no deed of mine  
 Shines brighter in the memory of the world  
 And none is treasured more by me:  
 Look how I saved the Blisses from divorce,  
 And kept the children free from that disgrace,  
 To grow up into moral men and women,  
 Happy themselves, a credit to the village.  
 ("Rev. Lemuel Wiley," p. 93)

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 189.

The irony of this is the fact that fulfilling the minister's directions caused bitter strife and untold opposition in the family. The fact remains however, that there is no revelation of a clergyman's character in the poem.

Consistency of character is not easy to evaluate in Masters' work because the reader must rely upon flashlight glimpses of characters which catches them briefly and in only one course of action. In general, Editor Whedon and Rhodes, who are discussed in other poems, carried through their relentless policy of war against all forces that opposed them. They were consistently cruel and domineering. As to the women who over a long period had given themselves to lives of sin, there is consistency. Some of them are Georgine Sand Miner (p. 107), Aner Clute (p. 55), and Dora Williams (p. 71). Mucinda Matlock, in contrast, lived seventy years of married life, an example to all.

Where inconsistency may show up is in the sudden change in a person's activity, usually ending in violent results. The murder cases cited bear this out. Searcy Foote, however, who chloroformed his old Aunt Persis, did not commit his crime "out of character." He had long been nursing resentment over her refusal to send him to college and to allow him to marry Delia Prickett. The murder was the outgrowth of his ordinary and usual disposition towards her. Barry Holden (p. 79) who split his wife's skull with a hatchet had long been pondering the mortgage, the large family, the nagging of his wife. Other characters reveal a similar shift to sudden and startling activity which does not clearly betray an appreciable change in disposition of character. Therefore, even violent outbursts do not indicate

inconsistency in character. This type of character portrayal is merely the Naturalist's manner of gaining attention and of using the journalistic style to advantage.

Robert Little said that "veracious characterization" is wanting in the Anthology. It is a fact that Masters took some of his characters from life; others, however, he found as mere signatures in the Illinois State Constitution. At any rate, whether based on life or not, the test is: Are they true to life?

To this question a categorical answer is impossible. Several instances can be cited of men and women in the Anthology who have a counterpart in life. Experiences similar to those in the Anthology have occurred to human beings and continue to occur. The point is that Elsa Wertman, Lois Spears, Lucinda Matlock, and some others reflect the human virtues and passions consonant with the notion of right living. Still, Masters' characters taken as a cross-section of mankind are not true to life. There is some truth, of course, in all of them. The Realist sees to that. Father Malloy as far as his portrayal goes, might have been far worse at the hands of a man like Masters. Elsa Wertman is courageous, sympathetic, and understanding. But when a large proportion of the book is given over to murderers, suicides, street-walkers, failures, and nondescript characters, all of whom do not fare so badly after death, do not fret over their future, and do not rise above the materialism in which they have lived and died, asking no forgiveness for malice and negligence, -- when this is the substance of the book, the impression is that it is not true to life. It is exaggerated Realism. And

yet, there are opinions like the following: "The keen, analytical grasp of character, his power to make them vivid and appealing is difficult to find elsewhere throughout the entire range of American literature."<sup>8</sup> It would be interesting to see what twenty-five characters Mr. Braithwaite would name as "vivid and appealing."

A comparison with characters of Crabbe ought to make it evident that Masters' creations are not even in the best instances as clearcut as those of Crabbe. As far as can be judged, Masters' characters are consistent. They differ in consistency with those of Crabbe insofar as many of them undergo sudden changes in their courses of action. Concerning trueness to life, the people in the Anthology picture a larger display of miserable, disillusioned mortals than those in the Borough. Although most of the characters taken individually are true to life, the total picture from Masters' pen is not a fair nor a reasonable facsimile of life.

The elevating effect of the better characters of Masters comes from those of nobility and those who endure sacrifices patiently. The depressing influence of other characters will follow.

Noble characters, although they reflect Naturalistic tendencies, can be interpreted in such a way as to be a good influence upon one. For example, Lois Spears symbolizes resignation to God's will despite a congenital defect, blindness. Patient surrender to the cares of rearing a family with this handicap and other obstacles confronting her is a good lesson. Father Malloy enjoys the qualities of a "good-fellow." He possesses that "human"

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<sup>8</sup>W. S. Braithwaite, "Spoon River Anthology," Forum, LV (January, 1916), p.119.

element which people, ignorant people, like to find in one so different by profession as a priest is from other human beings. Elsa had committed a fault, but she made the best of the consequences, suffering patiently a strange woman to adopt her child and to drive honor from him. Mrs. Purkapile thrills the reader with her stand concerning divorce, but his position is not without selfishness and shreds of revenge, for she says:

I refused to be drawn into a divorce  
By the scheme of a husband who had merely grown tired  
Of his marital vow and duty.

("Mrs. Purkapile," p. 143, ll. 12-14)

Whereas these four characters can be interpreted as elevating in their effect upon the reader, still, in comparison with the elevating characters of Crabbe, they are created in an atmosphere of materialism. Besides, even the style of presentation is Naturalistic.

Sacrifices made by mankind always touch a tender spot in the human heart and arouse the will to seek higher objects in life. Elsa's courageous mastery of her maternal instincts is exemplary. Lucinda Matlock, with her twelve children and seventy years of married life to her credit, is a challenge to any noble-minded soul.

For the most part, the total impression from a reading of the Anthology is one of prevailing depression. Melancholy, sadness, and dejection spring on the one hand from the subject-matter and on the other from the manner of treatment. In this chapter the emphasis is on depression considered objectively, that is, from the impression given by the character itself, not by the attitude of the author towards his character.

In the previous study of the setting, the general environment helped



towards building up a spirit of gloominess. In the present chapter the persons of that locale do the same thing.

A complete survey of characters who are involved in unpleasant and gloomy situations would include over half the people in the Anthology. Details in their human lives include all the unsavory actions connected with shocking murders, suicides, death by accident, violations of the sixth and ninth commandments, and failures in life. Constant association with literary figures who are depraved, deceived, and disgusting types, without being shown any justification for parading such gross perversity causes gloominess.

In addition to dismal types of people one reads the complaints of innumerable characters. Cassius Hueffer could not tolerate an epitaph which painted him as an "angel." He devised one of his own and added:

Now that I am dead I must submit to an epitaph  
Graven by a fool!  
("Cassius Hueffer," p. 7, ll. 14-15)

Judge Sommers (p. 13) failed to understand how a man of his learning could be less honored in death than the town drunkard, Chase Henry. Daisy Fraser (p. 20) found it difficult to pay ten dollars and costs before Justice Arnett while corrupt politicians were excused. Barney Hainsfeather (p. 88) moaned his fate in being buried in a place like Spoon River. Characters such as these mirror the spirit of dissatisfaction that pervades the atmosphere of the cemetery on the hill.

Joined to voices of protest are indications of a lack of hope that produce upon one a depressing effect. Robert Southey Burke had placed great hope and trust in A. D. Blood as a leader, but he learned the hidden faults

of the man, commenting

And I say to all, beware of ideals,  
Beware of giving your love away  
To any man alive.

("Robert Southey Burke," p. 70, ll. 20-23)

Margaret Fuller Slack (p. 48) despaired of ever writing her novel once her family had started to increase. Benjamin Pantier (p. 15) grew indifferent under treatment of his wife who drove him out because he wrote poetry and smelled of whiskey and onions. Gossip and slanderous murmurings accompanied Lambert Hutchin's efforts to do right and to rear his daughters comfortably; so, he gave up hope with the attitude of

And what was the whole of the business worth?  
Why, it wasn't worth a damn!

("Lambert Hutchins," p. 149, ll. 25-26)

In contrast to Crabbe's depressing characters there is less concern in those of Masters for the gradual ruin through deterioration, followed finally by despair. Apart from the fact that Masters must condense the character within a few lines, there is a strong impression that he prefers to pass over anything like lengthy or protracted decay and to arrive at the point quickly. This trait coincides with his journalistic style of indicating facts with only a minimum space given to motives and consequences.

In summary, attention has been called to the peculiar construction of the Anthology with its epitaphs telling the salient facts about the 244 characters treated in separate poems. The purpose of the chapter was stated as being a study of certain characters that show Naturalistic evidences and a comparison of Masters' characterizations with the Realistic characterization of Crabbe.

Characters were divided into simple and complex types, and the following observations were made: simple characters of Masters are matter-of-fact, partly because they are condensed within such a small span of verses, also because of the Naturalistic style. Complex characters of Masters are less complex than those in the Borough because they are superficial embodiments of some idea or are only types, not individuals. In comparison with Crabbe's they fail as convincing psychological studies in that they do not succeed in arousing the emotions of fear and pity but only in emphasizing factual details. Moreover, they do not possess the dramatic interest that Crabbe maintains by tracing deterioration and gradual breakdown of a character.

Because of the abundance of sinners in the Anthology a division was made on the basis of morality: stained souls, indifferent characters, and noble souls. Among the stained souls, Naturalism is evident in the inclusion of practically every field of crime and sinful activity as well as in the exaggerated proportion of evil over good people. It is evident also from the spirit of materialism shining through their characters and preoccupation with details, sordid and otherwise. Indifferent persons manifest Naturalism by the photographic, journalistic, analytical, and crude style in which they are portrayed. Noble men and women are scarce, but they fit into the Naturalistic scheme by reason of their being embedded in an atmosphere of materialism. Motives impelling them to action and Masters' delineation of their characters are Naturalistic.

The test of good characterization shows that the characters of Masters are not so distinct, clearcut, and alive as those of Crabbe, for

the most part. Insofar as can be judged from the short space allotted them by the American poet, they are consistent. Some of them individually are true to life, but taken as a representative group from a village even like Spoon River, they form an exaggerated cross-section of mankind.

From the reader's point of view some of Masters' characters have qualities that are ennobling, but the materialistic atmosphere and the note of cynicism underlying the lives of these people render them far less effective than Crabbe's are in this regard. Depression broods over the reader of Masters' materialistic setting because it encloses a wide array of "case histories" of evil people -- deeds in the lives of men that stare from the pages without any apparent purpose of helping mankind to live a better life. The back-biting, complaining, and exposing of one another's secrets is annoying too. Finally, lack of hope and despair of so many people lend a kind of inky darkness to the cloud of depression that settles upon the reader.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE NATURALISTIC ATTITUDE IN THE SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY

This chapter relies upon observations made in both previous chapters concerning setting and characterization, in arriving at a fuller understanding of the attitude of Masters in the Anthology. Already reflection upon the mental outlook of the poet has been made by references to places and persons in the story. It remains to examine further the kind of disposition that created such scenes around Spoon River. Since some degree of familiarity with Masters' type of work has been attained, this can be done by first looking into his personal background and then observing how his ideas, beliefs, and prejudices have been expressed in the Anthology.

Masters' natural disposition and training shed light upon his attitude in the Anthology. Apart from his education, Masters possessed qualities of character that could easily be molded into a Realistic temperament. Born of sturdy pioneer stock he inherited a force of character that revealed itself in a revolutionary nature, resisting and propelling -- resisting what disagreed with him, thrusting forward wherever his nature sought expression. Denunciatory and bitter towards life, Masters exemplifies the breakdown of tradition. One phase of that destructive process being a state of confusion and chaos, Masters embodied a cynicism that leads to despair.<sup>1</sup> Impatience was one of his traits which helped to create the mood in which much of the Anthology must have been written. Like Crabbe he was not popular socially

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Lowell, p. 141.

because he shunned people in whom he found no interest. There is a sense of self-importance in Masters illustrated by his readiness to believe that he was the "reincarnation of Chaucer." With this reference to the fourteenth century poet, John Cowper Powys, the Cambridge scholar, flattered Masters in a Chicago lecture during which Masters became flustered because he did not understand how he could live up to the new role thrust upon him.<sup>2</sup>

Masters formal education was quite incomplete. He had read widely in literature but none too wisely even before he went to Knox College. In, fact, whatever he learned of literature and philosophy came from reading habits cultivated during high school and one year at college. Like Crabbe, he was obliged to abandon plans for college training. Meanwhile, shunted into the legal profession for which he had no inclination, he amused himself writing verse. Home conditions, strained by Mrs. Masters' selfish efforts to make an educated lady of his sister with the use of limited family resources, left Edgar filled with resentment and discouragement.

Then, the school of experience took hold where his formal training ceased abruptly. Rivalry at home, prodding in his father's law office, and the continual tedium of the Midwestern town taught him that his sturdy nature needed more territory for expansion. Life in Chicago opened broad vistas of interests which beckoned to his curiosity and his eagerness to write. Once in the city, he spent years trying to build a law practice, a gruelling work indeed. Somehow during these years he kept a wide interest in reading and

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<sup>2</sup>N.B.: this fact is mentioned by Masters, Autobiography, p. 373.

hoped to be able to gain sufficient leisure and resources to develop a literary career. Until the age of forty-six, however, he did little serious writing and had to be satisfied with reading and the constant struggle to secure himself in his work. Despite his avowal of his proficiency in the classics and in English and German literature, the manner in which his writing varies from good to commonplace indicates that his learning is only half-digested. There are traces of the student in the Anthology, but the even balance and fine judgment of the scholar are generally wanting. Thus, his libertine nature made its force felt in his formal learning and in his experience.

The Autobiography of Masters gives an amusing view on his religious attitude. With churches he had no affiliation. The Bible itself held no sway for Masters. Of it he says:

However, with years and study I came to the definite conclusion that the Bible should be thrown away, and utterly eliminated from human interest, except as literature . . . . In a word, I think that Christianity has falsified and enervated the world, America included . . . . To my mind there is hardly an utterance of Jesus that is sound and true, while his mind and his character are inferior to those of Socrates, Confucius, Aristotle, and Plato.<sup>4</sup>

Whether Masters believes in a personal God is not clear. In the Anthology he speaks in a contradictory manner, and at times it is not possible to distinguish Masters' personal belief from that of his characters. The follow-

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<sup>3</sup>Aiken, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup>Masters, Autobiography, p. 401.

ing statement of his appears pantheistic in context: ". . . there is no God to seek but that one which is present in all beings, and in nature . . ." <sup>5</sup>

But the "Glory to God in the highest" of Lois Spears is Christian. Whatever his belief in the Deity, there is no follow-up with notions of sorrow for sins, no spirit of contrition among the cemetery-souls, no reverence for the dead and practically no sanction for wrongdoing. Hod Putt (p.3), the murderer, sleeping peacefully and Dorcas Gustine's "I am content" after his crime, not to mention many cases of soiled characters studied in the previous chapter are ample evidence for this irreligious spirit. Deism, the belief in a personal God who created the world and then left it alone, is found in two poems. Henry Phipps spent himself working for Thomas Rhodes and his banking clique.

Then suddenly, Dr. Meyers discovered  
 A cancer in my liver.  
 I was not, after all, the particular care of God!  
 ("Henry Phipps," pp. 208-09, ll. 23-25)

John Ballard had cursed God, then grew skeptical in his denial of God's power, and finally died too late to make friends with him.

And I cursed God for my sufferings;  
 Still He paid no attention to me;  
 He left me alone, as He had always done.  
 I might as well have cursed the Presbyterian  
 steeple.  
 ("John Ballard," p. 250, ll. 5-18)

Obviously, neither of these excerpts necessarily represents Masters' own belief, but in view of what has been found above concerning his religious no-

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>6</sup>Littel, p. 190f.



tions, Deism fits into his frame of Naturalism quite harmlessly.

Trying to classify Masters religious beliefs leads to his philosophy. He offers no clear statement of a philosophy of life; but since ideas and feelings blurred and overshadowed his portraits and were more significant to him than the portraits themselves,<sup>6</sup> some effort to clarify his philosophy must be made.

There are only vague indications of a philosophy in the Autobiography, but they are the springboard upon which some definite ideas can be shaped. Chance has a place in Masters' scheme of things. In one of his passages in which he indulges in self-psychoanalysis, he writes:

. . . and I saw but one story, which was that Nature pours forth creatures and lets them live or perish, according to chance. All through my poems there run the two streams of realism and mysticism. I wrote with my cyclopean eye many of the portraits of Spoon River, and with my dreaming eyes I wrote, "The Star," and "The Loom."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, he is a conscious Realist and claims equally to be a mystic. Another passage shows him thinking of himself as a vates in his role of mystic. Who would not say, he asks

. . . by this half-sacriligious revelation of their secrets [of the dead] , that I had convoked about my head swarms of powers and beings who were watching me and protesting and yet inspiring me to go on . . . .<sup>8</sup>

Besides believing in mysterious forces working about him he felt that the good fortune he enjoyed was conditioned by the directions of fate that went

<sup>6</sup>Littel, p. 190f.

<sup>7</sup>Masters, Autobiography, p. 318.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 351.

forth at the time of his birth.<sup>9</sup> Other references to fate come up later in connection with the expression of Masters' attitude.

What critics and commentators have to say about Masters' philosophy is interesting. Stating that philosophy is almost totally lacking, one writer observes traces of sensuality, fatalism and materialism.<sup>10</sup> Another rather effusive attempt discovers that "It is an epicurean philosophy, no doubt, one which follows earthly paths and finds happiness a sufficient aim; but beyond this immediate goal lies the remote horizon of mystery."<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the opinion that Masters brings beauty into his poetry, there is better judgment in the statement that he is an Imagist who "too seldom includes the ideal values which are at least as important in human experience . . . ."<sup>12</sup> Another writer without explaining his statement claims that Masters' philosophy offers nothing unless human tolerance.<sup>13</sup>

In view of these comments and from what the Autobiography offers as well as from conclusions derived from the two previous chapters, it is reasonable to conclude that Masters is a Realist of the more exaggerated kind, a Naturalist. This implies that he has materialistic tendencies that find expression in pessimism, fatalism, and sensualism. Precisely how this conclusion can be verified by examples taken from Spoon River Anthology remains to be studied.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 399.

<sup>10</sup>Ina B. Sessions, A Study of the Dramatic Monologue in American and Continental Literature (Alamo Printing Co., San Antonio, Texas, 1933), p. 120.

<sup>11</sup>Harriet Monroe, Poets and Their Art (The Macmillan Co., New York, 1926),

<sup>12</sup>John Erskine, The Kinds of Poetry (Bobbs, Merrill Co., Indianapolis, Indiana, 1920), p. 120f.

<sup>13</sup>Wright, p. 111.

The phases of Realism through which this attitude of Masters runs are in general those under which the attitude of Crabbe was studied. They are: details, humor, irony, cynicism, satire, disillusion, fate, and preaching. There is no implication that these are the only manifestations of this type of writing, but they represent fairly well some of the more significant characteristics of Naturalism.

The Naturalist's attitude towards details can be derived from the previous consideration of his method of treatment in Chapter IV. The representation of objects in a style that is photographic, journalistic, analytical, and coarse depends upon the writer's attitude towards his style. In Chapter IV the exposition of the style in itself was given. Here, it should suffice to indicate that Masters' style is an outgrowth of his driving, frank, showy and legalistic disposition.

Masters' Naturalistic approach to details springs from his legalistic outlook and from his flare for unusual subjects. Like Crabbe, he had a scientific bent, but it was more legalistic. He searched for facts, related points, case histories, not herbs, fossils, and sea urchins. Masters could have been more intellectual had he tried to use facts in arriving at some principle or law according to which his mortals respond. Instead, he used all of his power in analysis, showing no capacity for synthesizing.<sup>14</sup> For example, he apparently scours about for every significant detail that has a bearing upon the hatchet murder of Barry Holden's wife. In "Felix Schmidt" (p. 177), concerning the loss of Schmidt's farm, there are such words as:

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<sup>14</sup>Louis Untermeyer, The New Era in American Poetry (H. Holt and Co., New York, 1919), p. 177.

"five acres"; "three thousand"; "eighty"; "in eighteen hundred and seventy-one"; "eleven dollars"; "tax Deed," which show a tendency for factual material.

Masters' choice of details and his usage of them spring from his distaste for uniformity and observance of the conventional manner of doing things. He glorifies people who perform extraordinary deeds even though they depart from the generally accepted notion.<sup>15</sup> Town Marshal Logan struck Jack Maguire with his night stick and was shot down in retaliation. Maguire (p. 43) was sentenced to fourteen years only because his lawyer made a bargain with the judge. Willard Fluke (p. 54) committed fornication with Aner Clute (p. 55). He repented and years later stood up in church to confess his sins. When he saw his daughter sitting in front of him, blind from birth, he dropped dead. Cooney Potter (p. 60) died, not of smoking cigars, but of gulping burning coffee and hot pieces of pie during the hot harvest season. These examples demonstrate a tendency to employ facts in such a way as to cause surprise.

Masters in striving to be different exhibits a lack of taste. This reveals itself from his frequent use of sordid topics: "Masters seems to suck a bitter pleasure from the contemplation of ugly, petty, sordid dramas which make up Spoon River Anthology."<sup>16</sup> It is remarkable how the women who figure in the stories come to the attention of the reader on the score of

<sup>15</sup>Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature since 1819 (Century Co., New York, 1925), p. 30.

<sup>16</sup>Babbitt Deutsch, This Modern Poetry (Norton and Co., New York, 1935), p. 51.

sex, how the men suffer violent deaths.<sup>17</sup> Reference has been made to Masters' immoral private life over which he in his old age gloats as he recalls in the Autobiography some of his lurid escapades.<sup>18</sup> He confesses that Mrs. William Vaughn Moody accused him of "sex-obsession" and other materialistic tendencies.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the satisfactory handling of sex requires tact and great taste, but Masters uses his difficult materials very inartistically.<sup>20</sup> Amy Lowell said that it was the "greatest blot" upon his work.<sup>21</sup>

There are other objections concerning Masters' taste that are put very pointedly by contemporary writers. Percy H. Boynton conjectures that the "Devious ways of love and explicit experiences of passion" have been overstressed; these problems and phenomena, he thinks, would be better adapted to an intellectual treatment in an essay, not in a poem.<sup>22</sup> Henry Van Dyke writes that Crabbe makes better verse and has a more pungent wit than Masters "who had added a new terror to death by the way in which he describes it."<sup>23</sup> John Powys, who singled out the Anthology as the "most original work American genius has produced since the death of Henry James," adds: "For where Spoon River is so great, where it overtops all recent American work . . . is in its extraordinary indulgence for what is called 'sin'."<sup>24</sup> Mr. Powys finds the greatness of Spoon River Anthology in the "indulgence" for what

<sup>17</sup>Clement Wood, Poets of America (E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1925), p.168

<sup>18</sup>Masters, Autobiography, Index, "Love Affairs," p. 423.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>20</sup>Wood, p. 172.

<sup>21</sup>Lowell, p. 175.

<sup>22</sup>Percy H. Boynton, Some Contemporary Americans (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1924), p. 57f.

<sup>23</sup>Van Dyke, p. 104.

<sup>24</sup>John C. Powys, "Edgar Lee Masters," Bookman, LXIX (August, 1929), 652.

The flippancy of this piece of sophistication is not a compliment to Masters. On the contrary, it actually levels the finger of severe reproach directly upon him. These various expressions of questionable taste demonstrate Masters' position with respect to certain ideals and principles of life.

Another phase of Masters' attitude is his type of humor which is seldom playful, light, delightful, and jovial as is that of Crabbe. It resembles Crabbe's in the grim humor found in the characters of Peter Nottage, Grimes, and Blaney. Harriet Monroe in an effusive passage finds that Masters' humor "permeates all his work . . . and helps to make his portraits so intensely and sympathetically alive."<sup>25</sup> The words "permeates" and "so intensely and sympathetically alive" are an exaggeration, for proof of which reference is made to many of the "card-board" characters considered in Chapter Five.

Some instances exist in which humor adds nothing at all to the characterization or is strained to gain effect. John Otis, an aristocrat, lambasts an upstart superintendent of the railroad for casting reflection on his glory and warns

And I say to you, Spoon River,  
And to you, O Republic,  
Beware of the man who rises to power  
From one suspender.

("John Hancock Otis," p. 123, ll. 16-19)

There is smartness in the following lines about the loose life of the dancer:

He brought me to Spoon River and we lived here  
For twenty years -- they thought that we were  
married! ("Russian Sonia," p. 86, ll. 14-15)

<sup>25</sup> Monroe, p. 49f.

A common, humorous thrust is found in the picture which a corpse on the hill has of his contented wife enjoying herself after his death.

And she smiled and said to a colored waiter:  
 "Another slice of roast beef, George.  
 Here's a nickel for your trouble."  
 ("Batterton Dobyne," p. 152, ll. 21-22)

A more familiar kind of humor in Masters rises from situations in which a party is thwarted in some activity or himself takes a different course of action. A. D. Blood, a prohibitionist and village reformer, complained about lack of enforcement of the high ideals of his party:

Why do you let the milliner's daughter Dora,  
 And the worthless son of Benjamin Pantier  
 Nightly make my grave their unholy pillow?  
 ("A. D. Blood," p. 69, ll. 5-7)

Two characters show a similarity in their reactions to problems in their lives. Jonas Keene (p. 99) went to bed in wet clothes and died refusing medical aid because his children were all failures. Albert Schirding (p. 98), a failure, committed suicide because all his children outshone him. These two characters border upon that type of grim humor found in Blaney and Grimes, but there is no further development of it, no projection to more than one event in their lives, such as with Blaney and Grimes.

Irony reflects Masters' spirit of revolt-from-the-village, characterized by hatred of the prevalent Puritanism in art, morals, and manners along with his attack on greed in business, on corruption in politics, and on insensitivity to beauty. Towards his country people this irony is sometimes merciless. Carl Hamblin (p. 130), for instance, publisher of the Clarion, saw his printing press smashed to pieces because he had mocked the exhibition of justice

which succeeded in hanging the anarchists in Chicago. Clarence Fawcett (p. 135) strode off to prison, ruined by Rhodes who had promised mercy if he confessed his theft. Daisy Fraser (p. 20), the streetwalker, had to pay ten dollars every time she appeared before the justice, fully aware that the corrupt politicians were exonerated.

Hypocrisy underlies the irony in some sketches. "Nicholas Bindle" is full of ironic contrasts. People always hounded him to give, but when his estate was probated, it had little value to it. Further, Nicholas asked

And think you not I did not know  
That the pipe-organ, which I gave to the church,  
Played its christening songs when Deacon Rhodes,  
Who broke the band and all but ruined me,  
Worshipped for the first time after his acquittal?  
("Nicholas Bindle," p. 45, ll. 7-11)

Roscoe Purkapile hoped to have his wife die and thereby dissolve his marriage ties; he even tried to get a divorce by deliberately being unfaithful to her. Ironically, she embraced him lovingly and forgave him. His reaction was

I then concluded our marriage  
Was a divine dispensation  
And could not be dissolved,  
Except by death.  
I was right.  
("Roscoe Purkapile," p. 142, ll. 17-21)

A different form of irony is in the contrast between what is reported about people and what is true.<sup>26</sup> Here Masters indulges in rather light humor in some cases. An example is that of Deacon Taylor (p. 58) who did not die of over-eating watermelon, as people thought, but had stepped behind

<sup>26</sup>Van Doren, p. 27.



the druggist's counter too often to sip his liquor. Cooney Potter (p. 60) killed himself with hot coffee and slabs of pie, not cigars. Cassius Hueffer (p. 7) repudiated the false epitaph over his own grave and substituted the bitter truth.

Where Masters takes on more distinctly Naturalistic qualities in his irony is with the attitude that suggests that the reputable people did not deserve their respectability in the village, that the disreputable ones were not so bad as the village thought.<sup>27</sup> Judge Somers (p. 13), intelligent and upright, fared worse in the cemetery than did the town drunkard, Chase. And Jeduthan Hawley (p. 166), the undertaker of unquestionable morals, who had observed that the dead were brought to his establishment in couples, ironically discovered in death that Daisy Fraser was his companion.

Disreputable people failed to smart under the yoke of death. Jack Maguire (p. 43), killer of Marshall Logan "learned to read and write." Dora Williams (p. 71), mistress of several men, peacefully read from her stone the inscription, "Contessa Navigato, Implora eterna quiete." Searcy Foote (p. 157) who had chloroformed his old aunt made off, unapprehended, because the coroner pronounced death from heart failure.

Thus, it appears that Masters' irony is similar to that of Crabbe, in its tragic quality. Masters is Naturalistic when he makes irony obey his impulse to expose both good and bad people. Cynically, he strips good men of their deserts and makes saints out of sinners. In this respect he is not like Crabbe, nor is he true to life adequately considered.

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

Objectively speaking, Masters' satire is not personal. Rather, it takes on the appearance of a social satire on town life in general. The political, business, social, and religious life as it is affected by two contesting parties, the Liberals and the Puritans, is the subject-matter. All of the abuses in social and private inequalities, in labor, in the professions, in the relationship of the sexes are found here. Masters had despised the restraints of the Puritan party in Lewistown and in Petersburg. In his stories many villagers are the victims of those stringent conventions.

In very many cases the epitaphs belie popular judgments passed upon the dead.<sup>28</sup> The irony of sketches like these suggests a thread of satire underlying them. Simple villagers were foiled by Deacon Taylor who died of draughts from the forbidden bottle, clandestinely snatched from behind the drugstore counter. Cooney Potter whose stomach was burned by hot coffee; Searcy Foote whose murder of his old aunt was never even suspected; Doctor Meyers whose life of devotedness to his patients did not harmonize with Mrs. Meyers' story of his sins with Minerva -- all of these characters satirize the unsuspecting populace. Other stories indicate that when the truth is told these people are seen in a far different light. This naturally casts a general reflection upon failings in village life and reveals a distinct vein of satire.

Concerning satire, the most notable item is that it is overdone. Just as with other features of his Realism, Masters does not know when his readers

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<sup>28</sup>Alfred C. Ward, American Literature, 1880-1930 (Milhuen and Co., Ltd., London, 1932), p. 166f.

have had enough.<sup>29</sup> To think that Spoon River had such a large proportion of unfortunate and disgruntled inhabitants is asking too much. It is equally absurd to point to Spoon River as a typical village. This exaggeration, then, shows an attitude which is dangerous because it makes light of life itself. Of course, this tendency is not alien to a Naturalist, and besides, Masters was inclined to finding fault with people and things.

Subjectively speaking, the satire of Masters reveals a mind that is in opposition to the people of Spoon River and their conventions. Masters' familiarity with political cunning, with pettiness in business dealings, and with other forms of social corruption engendered within him a scorn of the lower middle class. Russell Blankenship,<sup>30</sup> however, claims that Masters made no indictment against the small town; that in getting "at the surface" he had to slough off "some of the scum left by false romance;" that this represents humanity everywhere. To this the answer is: If this represents the SURFACE of mankind EVERYWHERE, then civilization has descended to a very sad state. In good literature, mishaps, faults, even crimes are not out of place. If, however, immoral acts go without final retribution, as very many individual cases and the general tone of the Anthology indicate, the book as literature is definitely immoral.

A comparison with the satire of Crabbe reveals that Masters has Naturalistic differences. In purpose, Crabbe's satire was social, with an intimation of trying to remedy conditions. Masters does not specifically

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>30</sup>Blankenship, p. 603.

declare a purpose, but his disillusioned eye, with which he fathoms the defects of victims, betrays merely a desire to expose facts to public view without any social uplift. The subject-matter of Crabbe is the faults of all classes and institutions. Masters tackles almost every aspect of life and even life itself. The manner of Crabbe is gentle in satire for he holds a reverence for the Borough. Masters blasphemes the village, nakedly exposing the most intimate, most personal secrets and passions of his men and women characters.

These people from whom hope has once vanished and into whose fibre disillusion has eaten its way are likely to become pessimistic and cynical. Lack of hope, disillusion, pessimism, and cynicism are related and do yeoman service for the Naturalist in whom all find fertile soil. Reference here to lack of hope is made to characters considered in the previous chapter having a depressing effect.

Disillusion wells from characters like Schroeder the Fisherman and Scholfield Huxley. Schroeder watched fish and swine push one another about until the stronger won the prize morsel. To the mind of Crabbe this pictures well the mad rush of greedy human beings to outdo their fellowmen. Schroeder says:

And I say if there's anything in man --  
 Spirit, or conscience, or breath of God  
 That makes him different from fishes or hogs,  
 I'd like to see it work!  
 ("Schroeder the Fisherman," p. 178, ll. 15-18)

Huxley had entered the ranks of the "great" by his scientific discoveries and investigations into the mysterious secrets of the earth and the heavens,

but he realizes how futile all of it is where he now lies:

How would you like to create a sun  
And the next day have the worms  
Slipping in and out between your fingers?  
("Scholfield Huxley, " p. 246, ll. 20-23)

This type of spirit of disillusion dominates the mood of the entire book.

Cynicism, implying a distrustful view of rectitude and sincerity, may be considered with pessimism. Masters is pessimistic about God, about life and its meaning, about ordinarily accepted ideals.

Some of the most sacred and essential institutions of Christian civilization have been impugned by the materialists. Masters touches upon a few of them in the Anthology. Davis Matlock, husband of Lucinda, entertains grave doubt about immortality, and his solution is to live as if it were true, insinuating that

If that doesn't make God proud of you  
Then God is nothing but gravitation,  
Or sleep is the golden goal.  
("Davis Matlock," p. 230, ll. 18-20)

Godwin James remained home to answer the call to a faithful practice of religion, but he found nothing in it but failure and disgust.

You and I, Harry Wilmans, have fallen  
In our several ways, not knowing  
Good from bad, defeat from victory,  
Nor what face it is that smiles  
Behind the demoniac mask.  
("Godwin James," p. 215, ll. 23-27)

Roscoe Purkapile (p. 142) lamented his inability to sever his matrimonial bond by divorce. Roger Heston (p. 117) who held the freedom of the will was gored by the cow which he set up as an example of his doctrine. Silas Dement, hired to burn down the old courthouse to make way for the new one,

returned from Joliet prison with the complaint:

For I was punished like all who destroy  
The past for the sake of the future.  
("Silas Dement," p. 180, ll. 24-25)

A certain mother whose child died in birth was prompted to philosophize on the infant's greater fortune in having been spared life with its numerous sorrows, "Death is better than life!"<sup>31</sup>

The similarities in disillusion and pessimism between Crabbe and Masters are evident. As Realists they share the great mantle of gloom that pervades the atmosphere. In difference, however, the spirit of darkness in Masters' book spreads over a larger field of human activity, and intermittent liftings of the cloud are fewer and of shorter duration than in Crabbe who has painted some very delightful scenes in the Borough. Unlike Crabbe who spends most of his pessimism on education, poor relief, the professions, and politics Masters is pessimistic about ideas not only of village life but of free will, divorce, immortality, the nature of God, life, and death. This is characteristic of the extremes of the Naturalist.

Reference to what Masters thought of fate is contained in an earlier part of this chapter dealing with his philosophy. Several examples that mirror this attitude of fate follow. In them, "destroy," "the pattern of life," and "forces" are manifestations of fate.

And now I know that we must life the sail  
And catch the winds of destiny  
Wherever they drive the boat.  
("George Gray," p. 65, ll. 11-12)

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<sup>31</sup>"Elizabeth Childers," p. 198, l. 126.

For the cloth of life is woven, you know  
 To a pattern hidden under the loom --  
 ("Widow McFarlane," p. 129, ll. 7-8)

Something outside myself drew me down,  
 ("Mickey M'Graw," p. 139, l. 2)

Eternal forces  
 Moved me on with a push.  
 ("Henry Phipps," p. 209, l. 29-30)

In time you shall see Fate approach you  
 In the shape of your own image in the mirror;  
 Or you shall sit alone by your own hearth,  
 And suddenly the chair by you shall hold a guest,  
 And you shall know that guest,  
 And read the authentic message of his eyes.  
 (Lyman King," p. 216, ll. 9-14)

In such verses the tone of a bitter despair, engendered by thoughts of cruel fate, prevails. Robert Fulton Tanner (p. 6) is an example. Harold Arnett, disillusioned about life, committed suicide and then despaired.

. . . . . Of what use is it  
 To rid one's self of the world,  
 When no soul may ever escape the eternal destiny  
 of life?  
 ("Harold Arnett," p. 47, ll. 15-17)

Physical determinism cannot be clearly attributed to Masters as it can to some Naturalists. One poem contains a reference to the action of the human will, strongly indicative of determinism.

You may blame Spoon River for what it is,  
 But whom do you blame for the will in you  
 That feeds itself and makes you dock-weed,  
 Jimpson, dandelion or mullen  
 And which can never use any soil or air  
 So as to make you jessimine or wisteria?  
 ("Calvin Campbell," p. 204, ll. 10-15)

Enough indications of free will stand out in the Anthology to deny that strict determinism seriously enters into Masters' attitude.

From these selections it is clear that fate is not treated differently from the way it is used in the Borough. Neither poet holds physical determinism. Necessity is something that can be offset by human design although it is described in extreme cases as "unrelenting." With this kind of unrelenting fate Crabbe manages to draw a more sympathetic picture of the victim, as he does with Abel Keene whose slow pitiable decline was observed in Chapter II.

Censuring and preaching in the Anthology need some explanation. Reproof is not foreign to Masters' disposition, for a man who has been tossed about suffering misfortunes, endowed with a strong personality, is likely to speak his mind when occasion arises. But when such a person begins to preach, one's suspicion is aroused. Masters had no formal religion; his idea of morals was not correct; his notion of life after death was faulty. Therefore, caution must be exercised when he lays down rules of conduct.

Reproof in the Anthology is part of the spirit of the book. The characters complain about themselves, about one another, about abuses in various channels of activity, but there is no specific platform upon which Masters stands. One feels that he disagreed with the general state of affairs and showed this in bringing to light the pettiness and foolishness of Spoon River. His reproof was that of an entire group of people and their manner of life.

Some of this spirit of reproof manifests itself in what can also be termed preaching. Masters uses platitudes which indicate that people of Spoon River strove to live a good life. For example, Mrs. Meyers warns passers-by how to avoid the fate of her husband. She says:



If your ways would be ways of pleasantness,  
 And all your pathways peace,  
 Love God and keep his commandments.

("Mrs. Meyers," p. 25, ll. 8-11)

Mrs. Purkapile (p. 143) saw that marriage as a contract is inviolable. John Ballard (p. 250) found that he had turned towards God too late and consequently lost him. The Village Atheist (p. 249) learned that immortality is an achievement possessed only by those who strive for it. There is sarcasm in Jacob Godbey's (p. 153) reproof of the liberals for thinking that personal liberty is liberty of the belly, not of the mind. And there is ridicule in the case of Rev. Wiley (p. 93) who flatters himself for advising Mrs. Bliss to abandon plans for divorce. She followed directions, and the entire family life turned into chaotic wrangling with the children taking opposite sides with the parents (p. 91). So much for his teaching of a harmless nature.

Masters' teaching is not always harmless. When the bitter pessimism of Robert Southey is epitomized by an exhortation to watch all ideals, there is not only pessimism but danger to be feared. Here is his admonition:

And I say to all, beware of ideals,  
 Beward of giving your love away  
 To any man alive.

("Robert Southey Burke," p. 70, ll. 21-23)

Chase Henry exemplifies the false doctrine that final retribution ends or is satisfied with death.

Take note, ye prudent and pious souls,  
 Of the cross-currents in life  
 Which bring honor to the dead, who lived in  
 shame.

("Chase Henry," p. 11, ll. 9-11)

It may be objected that these instances do not warrant a condemnation of

Masters himself. The answer is, that, granting the objection, the flavor left after a reading of many suicides, murders, and sex offenses, most of which meet with no ultimate retribution in the Anthology, is unwholesome. At least there should be adequate signs of disapproval. There being only scant evidence of it, the book is immoral in this respect.

Crabbe had a clear sense of sin and a horror of it; Masters had neither. Crabbe disdained the village but sincerely tried to help it by sound warnings and exhortations. Even his reproof of individuals was filled with tender sympathy. Masters preached to a village in which his main interest appears to have been to expose its weakpoints. His preaching is suspect, as if he were striving for effect. Some of his directions are incorrect because he is not fortified by sound religious principles and because his jaundiced eye sees the world through a veil of disillusion. In addition, his failure to bring retribution into his sketches is quite blameworthy.

In this final chapter, the disposition, education, religion, and philosophy of Masters have been examined to obtain a fuller appreciation of his attitude as it is expressed in the Anthology. Masters is a sturdy individual, a self-educated man who professes no religion and shows evidences of a materialistic philosophy. With these more definite personal factors in mind, a study was made of the various Realistic characteristics which tend to clarify and to certify a Naturalistic attitude of Masters in the Anthology.

First in the order of Realistic characteristics that were considered is the examination of details. The broad field from which Masters chose his great variety of details and his open manner of treating unusual and

and delicate subjects betray a lack of taste, more blameworthy than Crabbe's but still quite becoming the Naturalist.

The humor, irony, and satire of Masters are heavier, more serious and more daring than those manifestations of attitude in Crabbe.

Pessimism, cynicism, fate manifest a more uniform and widespread cloud of gloom that penetrates intimate truths in man's relation to God, opening the front door to crass materialism.

The preaching of Masters causes suspicion because he is materialistic in outlook and fails to recognize a final sanction to violations of the moral law. For this reason, his attitude towards life is not correct, and the Anthology violates fundamental principles of morality.

## CONCLUSION

Certain facts in the lives of Crabbe and of Masters that have a bearing upon their Realism are significant. Some of the external aspects are very similar. Both poets grew up amid squalid surroundings and sympathized with the hard lot of the poor. They were obliged to abandon studies with but little formal education; they entered a profession in which they were not interested; they left home in discouragement seeking better prospects in a large strange city; they experienced the anxiety of painfully awaiting a day when they could seriously devote their time to writing. Finally, after continued disappointment they entered upon their chosen literary careers, still retaining strong native influences, never able to shake off scientific methods of handling details.

In general, the fundamental differences in the two men spring from external forces and internal ones. Externally, Crabbe was not greatly influenced by the forces operating during his lifetime. He had been born in a period in which great change was taking place because of industrial, political, and social upheavals of the eighteenth century. At that time, Classicism and Romanticism were the chief movements in literature. Crabbe had scorned the emphasis placed upon imagination by the Romanticists; he disliked pastoral scenes executed in the Classicist style. What he emerged with was a form of moderate Realism couched in Classicist couplets. By large political, religious, and social issues he was not affected. In fact, his disposition was too complacent and even-tempered to suffer him to become a

serious threat to anything.

Masters, on the other hand, lived among people of pioneer stock that had migrated across the continent from the East coast, fighting first the Indians, then the issues of the Civil War, and finally the Puritans in their midst. Masters became a part of the tense atmosphere in which he lived and never lost some of its revolutionary spirit. Even later in Chicago he continued to manifest a fighting spirit which, he claimed, alone carried him over the rough spots in his battle for existence, then for recognition. In this manner, both poets manifest differences that become apparent in their writing.

Viewed from the important position of religion they were also very different. Crabbe was a good Christian. In fact, upon Burke's suggestions he studied for the ministry and became a minister who certainly brought as much credit to the profession as the average Protestant clergyman, more interested in literature than in his religious calling. But Masters' orthodoxy is open to genuine doubt. He denies that there is any good in the Bible, unless it be considered as a literary manuscript. He is a free-thinker whose revolutionary spirit prompts him to scoff at accepting Christ as the greatest teacher and at reverencing hallowed ideals and ancient beliefs of mankind. This spirit of irreligion of Masters accounts much for Naturalistic tendencies in his writing.

Subject-matter used in the Borough and in the Anthology is similar. Obviously, the theme in each book is identical -- the small town. Each poet used a setting with which he was thoroughly familiar; each chose char-

acters that he really understood. Both men went down into the dirty homes of the poor and worked out their social, political, religious, economic, and domestic problems with those people. But Masters betrays the Naturalistic touch by his attention to a wider range of problems, details, and types of persons. Along with the ordinary, lowly people he fearlessly introduces all kinds of details which he conveniently fits into his wide range of subject-matter.

With respect to the form of expression, good characterization is Crabbe's claim to distinction. In addition, his psychological Realism has been acknowledged generally. Masters, however, has only a few characters that are not merely matter-of-fact creations -- embodiments of some abstract idea. Nor are they any longer human, once they become psychological. Consequently, they fail to arouse emotions of fear and pity.

Crabbe has not the power of characterization of a Chaucer or a Shakespeare, but his characters are distinct representations of human beings. The defect in them is that they are not fully inspired. Masters' characterizations reveal in their creator distinguishing characteristics of a Naturalist. They embrace every conceivable type and plane of activity. They cover the field of almost every kind of crime. They expose intimate relationships and secrets, ordinarily left unmentioned according to good taste. In this broad selection of character, startling traits predominate at the expense of solid and enduring qualities of character.

Those characters of Masters that ennoble his readers appear less effective and convincing than Crabbe's because they are conceived in an

atmosphere of materialism. Even their lives are overshadowed by a cloak of cynicism, not present in the characters of Crabbe.

Another feature in the style of these men is their use of details. Facts, not fancies, are peculiar to the Realist. The physical Realism of Crabbe and Masters is replete with minute observation. Sharp lines of actual things form the customary pattern of the Realist. This preciseness with Crabbe offends when he descends to unpleasant details and all manner of physical dirt. Seldom does he reveal moral uncleanness. When he does, he always treats the situation morally, measuring out punishment for wrongdoing.

Masters approaches details in the guise of a newspaper writer in whom the frankness with which he tells his story is considered an asset, from a Naturalistic point of view. Coarseness in Masters' work generally borders on sordid details, not mere dirt. Crabbe's people totter about in mud, in decaying rubble, and in unswept houses; Masters bypasses these usual Realistic elements and offends when he spies into motives and low appetites of men and women, neglecting to select adequately his subjects for a literary presentation. Had Masters been able to offer some reasonable justification for his stark revelations there might be more consideration due him.

The use of humor, irony, and satire varies considerably with Crabbe and Masters. Humor in the Borough is tender and sympathetic; irony, generally tragic; satire, impersonal and intended sincerely to benefit society. In the Anthology humor adds little to the situation or to characters themselves and is sometimes strained to gain effect. Irony is often quite

bitter, showing Masters' disdain for village customs. Here the Naturalist reveals that respectable villagers do not always deserve their respectability, that disreputable ones are not so bad as they were judged. The satire on Spoon River is overdone because Masters did not know when to stop. There is in it too much misfortune, misunderstanding, and grumbling in the village to convince one that it is a typical community or a true cross-section of its members.

Fate that darkens the picture of both communities is not inexorable, but disillusion that follows upon it broods over man in the Borough's atmosphere although it never really overwhelms him. Masters engenders a state of dissatisfaction and gloom that reeks with pessimism and cynicism, for he conjures up doubts concerning the chief issues in life: the idea of God; wholesome ideals of the people; the freedom of the will; even life itself. This gives him a strongly Naturalistic coloring.

By profession Crabbe was a preacher whose tenderness shines through his rebukes and reproofs in the Borough. In contrast, the few instances of sound advice in the Anthology are outweighed by the large number of situations which must be judged suspect because of Masters' materialism that demands no final moral sanctions.

Thus, the differences in matter and form, observable in the Realism of the Borough and the Anthology, are those only of degree; but they are of such a kind as to merit for Masters the classification of Naturalist.

Problems that have arisen during the course, but not the scope of this paper, can be put briefly.



Concerning Crabbe and Masters there are questions common to both. Difference of opinion exists as to whether they are poets at all. This suggests an investigation into the nature and function of poetry, with a special application to the Borough and the Anthology. It would be interesting to learn what further qualifications to the term "Realist," in regard to Crabbe, would be necessary if all of his works, not only the Borough were investigated. A parallel study could be made with all the works of Masters, testing his Naturalism in them.

Regarding Crabbe himself several problems have arisen. There is a question as to why he retired from writing for twenty years, from 1790-1810, and then published his better work. If his chief distinction lies in characterization, as Lang believes, what are the strong and weak points specifically? Why did Crabbe choose the Popeian couplet which was quickly being relegated to the past? As a piece of literature, what value has the Borough? Since there are signs of a renewed interest in Crabbe today, how would the judgments of contemporary criticism measure up to what was thought of him in his own day or within a short time of his death.

Concerning Masters the query of which individual chiefly influenced him is open to study. He is said to have followed Crabbe and Robinson but denies having been aware of their influence. It has been affirmed that he followed so-called Freudian psychology. Since someone has denied that he had ever been familiar with it, this question might develop into a study of conscious or unconscious influences of Freud upon Masters. The aesthetic value of the Anthology invites study in such questions as, Does the book possess poetic value? Is it literature?

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Lawrence J. Flynn, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

June 2, 1947  
Date

Norman Weyand, S.J.  
Signature of Adviser