

The City



Brad Ramsey

*Being a Pastiche of Book One
of George Crabbe's The Village*

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To Linda,

Still in our lays fond Corydons complain

—GEORGE CRABBE, THE VILLAGE

Preface

George Crabbe (1754-1832) was an English writer of poems and verse tales memorable for their realistic details of everyday life. Hating his mean surroundings and unsuccessful occupation as a surgeon, he abandoned both in 1780 and went to London to be a poet. In 1783, he demonstrated his full powers of verse with *The Village*, an attempt to portray realistically the misery and degradation of rural poverty, while making good use of his detailed observation of life in the bleak countryside from which he came. In writing this pastiche, I have sought continuity in the poetics and style of the poet and have described my lived experience in community housing.

Argument

The subject proposed - Remarks upon George Crabbe's Poetry -
Fortune Described - An Impoverished City -
Rude manner of inhabitants - Ruinous effects of the Sex Trade
The City life more generally considered: evils of it -
The Youthful Laborer - The Old Man: his soliloquy -
The Community Access: its inhabitants -
The Sick Poor: their Pharmaceutical -
The dying pauper - The City priest.

The City life, where every care still reigns,
O'er youthful peasants and declining swains;
What labor yields, and what, that labor past,
Age, in its hour of languor, finds at last;
What remain the picture of the poor,
Recall a song – the Muse shall sing once more.

Past are those times, when in heroic verse,
Their country's honor or its joys rehearse.
Few poets laud in captivating strains,
The beauty of long industrial plains.
And chimera to all the pains we feel,
The vibrancy the city lights reveal.
While, he who condemned the pastoral lay,
Might damn a City in our modern day.

In ancient Troy, in Priam's bloody reign,
Around the City walls and twice again – *But*,
Shall this poem the Classical prolong
Mechanical tribute to an old song?
From fair market price do I not soon stray
Where homage, not the evening, paves the way?

Yes. The Muse sings in the Romantic Age,
And all since then has fitted to a page.
She sings of peasants' pipes, but the throng, now,
Chase *muff* around and like their pleasures low;

The Muse, for all her masses, has no rhyme,
As concord lacks in our discordant time.
Save I, what son of verse would even share,
In heroic, eighteenth century care?
Or would the rarer flower of the field,
Increase the value of the garden's yield?

Would land enclosure suit my modern hand,
With repercussions felt throughout the land?
Still, a Romantic thought I needn't ask,
For Rip Van Winkle 'twas no easy task -
Who went to sleep two hundred years ago,
And dreamed the lower class had caught their foe,
He woke today supposing King George well,
But wondered if the vote was worth this hell.

I grant, indeed, Postmodernism fair,
When money grows and there's no other care.
But when amid this new romance we trace,
This postmodernist might lose his place -
As Fortune smiles on some, with fervid ray,
On some donned heads, or some other array;
While some with softer head and fainter heart,
Deplore their Fortune, but still play their part.
Then shall I - this most caught out kidder - abide,
In H.D., out of some poetic pride?

No, my lesson comes from an unique Bard,
Where groves and happy dales are duly marred,
Where the real endemic cares he relates,
Exemplify his pastoral's finest traits.
George Crabbe once wrought a picture of the cot,
As Truth would paint it, and as Bards had not.
Nor you, dear reader, a poor pastiche disdain,
And say my latest song is sung in vain.
Overcome with hunger and still losing time,
Allow me the example of his rhyme -
Would George Crabbe deny me a little bread,
If I, for village life, gave the town's instead?
Let this passing song distaste overpower,
And make you more forgiving from this hour.

Lo! How this City with steel beams grown o'er,
Sprawls in its greyness for the rich and poor.
Like a dark labyrinth the grid appears,
Where all shall walk their block despite their fears.
Fortune, the real kidder, I yet defy,
Looks o'er the land, with greyness in her eye.
Supremely she stands, her arms spread afar,
She rules this City, her subjects at war.
With laughter she mocks the hope of toil,
Success is hidden in her winding coil.
Her song is a child's in these busy streets,