

# Mythologizing and Demythologizing of Rural life in the Poetry of Gray, Goldsmith, and Crabbe

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Završni rad

Mentor: doc.dr.sc. Boris Berić

Osijek, 2016.

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## Abstract

Rural life has been portrayed as idyllic for a long time in literature, while the reality of villagers' life was concealed. The eighteenth century was a harsh period of time, especially for villages, due to the advancement in economy and industry, which made villagers' life even harder. Thomas Gray, Oliver Goldsmith, and George Crabbe refused to create illusions about rural life in their poetry, so they described rural life as it was. Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is a well-known poem that sheds light on lives of the poor villagers and describes the hardships of their everyday work, breaking the illusions previously set by the pastoral poetry, but keeping beautiful descriptions of rural nature. Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" brings sadness into the speaker's realization upon returning to his idyllic childhood village that it is now in ruins and abandoned, blaming luxury and greed of the rich people for creating such atrocity. Lastly, George Crabbe brings the harsh truth in its purest form in his poem "The Village", describing the abject poverty and life full of suffering and sickness the poor people lived in, mentioning not a single positive feature about the so-called peaceful rural life. These poems bring another perspective to the usual pastoral one, creating a realistic picture of what rural life genuinely is.

Keywords: rural life, Thomas Gray, Oliver Goldsmith, George Crabbe, demythologizing

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## Introduction

Many poets have been inspired by the rural life and nature to write pastoral poems, setting the idyllic tone that was associated with villages and rural places ever since. In the eighteenth century some poets wanted to depict rural life in contrast to the pastoral poets, such as classical poet Virgil or English poets Robert Herrick and John Milton, who portrayed rural life as perfect and peaceful. There was no true picture of a rural worker anymore; instead, poets included some imaginary creatures, such as fairies and demigods, to make rural places perfect again. Since the economy advanced and there were new inventions, villagers were not mere farmers and shepherds, but rather acted “like a new colony” (Goodridge 2). It seems that the literature of the eighteenth century “lost any sense of the countryside as a field full of folk” (Goodridge 2) and it was not fit for poetic beauty anymore, except in some eccentric styles. In order to bring the old poetic descriptions, poets, such as Oliver Goldsmith or John Milton, had to go back in time in search of the perfect rural character, thus returning to the pastoral poetry. Other poets, such as George Crabbe or T.S. Eliot, went in the opposite direction – creating anti-pastoral poems. Pastoral poets brought many more meanings to the villages and rural life, all of which should depict simple and ideal life. Naturally, it cannot be accomplished in real life, so it is an endless abyss of inspiration for different kinds of arts (Goodridge 3). The anti-pastoral poets are often specified as a part of the movement called pastoral realism, which, as the name suggests, describes rural life the way it is, without twisting the reality in order to achieve poetic beauty. Despite the change in rural life, it could be said that the view of it depended greatly on the individual’s perspective; the descent from the golden age of rural life for some was seen as corrupt and negative, but others claim that one should always be able to see beauty in all creation (Goodridge 12). Harshness of labor of villagers turned from a simple lifestyle to a life full of poverty and pain, as they had to change their ways to fit the economy and industrialization.

The poems of Thomas Gray, George Crabbe, and Oliver Goldsmith are sometimes classified as “poetry of sensibility” due to their sublime effect and sense of loneliness and isolation. They also use nature as a descriptive method for portrayals of rural life and for comparison between what the pastoral poems described and what it actually looks like. In some of these poems rural life is still mythologized, even though villages in the eighteenth century were by no means an idyllic place, while in others life is described truthfully and even frowned because of the harsh conditions that

came to be. Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" connects all the aspects of rural life with death and loss. Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" shows the barren truth behind all the pastoral imagery, while George Crabbe's "The Village" depicts harsh conditions in which people live.

## 1. Demythologization of villagers' lives in Thomas Gray's poem

Thomas Gray is an English poet of the eighteenth century and is considered to be “the second most important poet” (Jackson) of the century and “the most talented poet of his generation” (Jackson). Despite his praises, Gray's work was scarce, and most of it was never published, according to the Poetry Foundation. Even his most loved and best known poem, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”, was too seldom heard (Jackson). Nevertheless, his poems still made an impact on the English poetry, especially on English elegies.

“Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” is a melancholic poem in which Gray describes rural life and nature and compares them to peasants' lives as he stands in the churchyard. The opening stanza of the poem is familiar to almost everyone who reads poetry (Jackson), and it runs as follows:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me. (Gray 1-4)

The stanza reflects “a melancholic evening mood that has probably never found better expression” (Jackson). The description of the rural scenery serves as a background to Gray's sorrowful thinking about the life of a peasant. “The parting day” and “the curfew” symbolize the inevitability of death, something none of us can avoid due to the mortality we were all given, regardless of our birthplace or social status. The poetic imagery that Gray portrays in this stanza describes everyday life in the country; the “herd” moving slowly across the field reminds us of the mundaneness and melancholy that accompanies villagers in their work, which is emphasized even more in the third verse where Gray describes the villager as a “plowman” that “plods his weary way”, showing how weary indeed the life of a farmer must be. Even though Gray mostly mythologizes rural life, like pastoral poetry did, he still shows some true aspects of it that are not idyllic. The fourth verse introduces the darkness, the night, which brings the sublime effect and the loneliness of the poet as he stands in the churchyard among graves. The two following stanzas describe the further descent into the night, mentioning the beauties of rural nature: “Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight / And



drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds” (Gray 7-8). These verses again emphasize his loneliness as more and more of the nature’s creation subsides and goes silent, apart from the owl that can still be heard from “yonder ivy-mantled tower” (Gray 9). The fourth stanza finally focuses on the graves in the churchyard:

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew tree’s shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,  
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,  
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep. (Gray 13-16)

This stanza seems to connect the pastoral idea of a simple rural life closely knit with nature, showing that even in death poor people were buried in the churchyard beneath a yew tree, while rich people were buried in the crypts. It also shows how they were buried “each in his narrow cell”, which implies their unity, how they always lived and worked both with nature and with each other, far more than rich people. Here the term “rude” refers to “their rustic simplicity” (Phelps 139); they lived a poor life, they died poor as well. The fifth stanza paints a picture of creatures and aspects of nature that peasants met every day in their life:

The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,  
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,  
The cock’s shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,  
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed. (Gray 17-20)

These are all features of rural life, things that one appreciates, things that those buried people will experience nevermore. Again, it shows that they lived poor farmer’s lives, in “straw-built shed[s]”, that they had to wake up at dawn to do the work that had to be done each day. Even though they were poor, their work is not to be looked down onto; Gray emphasizes their impact and strength when he says “How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!” (Gray 28). Most of the time rich people mock peasants and disrespect and devalue their work, but Gray warns:

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor. (Gray 29-32)

The word “toil” explains their life so well; it shows that it was not simple and idyllic, it was a struggle and it did not even guarantee a survival because their “destiny [was] obscure” and so they had to be happy with what they had, mainly family and mundane little things. They never received grandeur for their work, even though it is crucial for everyone since they produce food, but rather only invoke a “disdainful smile” in the ones who see their life. But whoever one may be, death awaits us all; all the “heraldry, the pomp of power, / And all that beauty, all that wealth” (Gray 33-34) it will all be meaningless upon death. Gray mocks rich people who chase glory and fame and despise poor people: “The paths of glory lead but to the grave” (Gray 36). He feels sorry for all the people that could have had an impact on the world, but due to their non-noble birth they did not have a chance to realize their ambitions: “Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, / And waste its sweetness on the desert air” (Gray 55-56). No matter how ambitious and intelligent one may be, they will waste their talent because they had to work hard for a simple country life. The unfairness of life because of one’s birthplace and name suppresses those talented people who will never be able to make their wishes come true:

Their sober wishes never learned to stray;  
 Along the cool sequestered vale of life  
 They kept the noiseless tenor of their way. (Gray 74-76)

They could never even think of achieving their dreams because of the chains of society that were laid on them; they were expected to work hard and all day, not be ambitious, and just do what they were told to. The “sequestered vale of life” depicts how they felt, as if they were forbidden to do what they wanted, so they “kept the noiseless tenor of their way”; they held back their dreams and silently moved on with their work. But even so, the poet sees their graves with holy texts “That teach the rustic moralist to die” (Gray 84), which means that they still want to be remembered and refuse to fall into the abyss of forgotten ones, even though they were not valued in life, so this way they ensure that someone will read the inscription and know that they existed. Gray describes how an epitaph on the grave reminds people of the deceased’s life and makes them think of all the deeds that person achieved in life, even though they never noticed it while he was alive. Although, Gray is highly ironic when speaking about the writings on the graves; the ones who will understand the hardships of the deceased’s life will not be able to read the inscription, while the ones who can read can never understand what the deceased had gone through (Sharp 19). The epitaph describes the

ordinary peasant life; the deceased is “A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown” (Gray 118), one who was not born a noble man, nor was he famous and cherished for what he has done. Being a peasant, “Melancholy marked him for her own” (Gray 120), showing how hard work affects people, especially because it is stated here that he was “a youth”. The second stanza of the epitaph describes how humble those peasants were:

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
 Heaven did a recompense as largely send:  
 He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,  
 He gained from Heaven (‘twas all he wished) a friend. (Gray 121-124)

The epitaph says that he had a large bounty, but he gave to misery all he had, which was only a tear; their painful and short lives were all they had and all they could give. It also shows how humble they were in their wishes; for all that he gave he received a friend, which was all that he wanted. While rich people chase money and fame, poor people only want love and friendship in the community. In the last stanza of the epitaph it says that one should not worry and search for woes and frailties of the deceased poor because now they can finally rest without their worries of hard life. The third verse of the last stanza says, “There they alike in trembling hope repose” (Gray 127), “they” being poor’s merits and frailties, which explains that their only true rest is in the “trembling hope” of the afterlife with God, showing that they were so desperate in seeking a peaceful life a safe future that they could only faintly believe in some afterlife that no one could ever be sure if it exists.

Gray strays from the path of mythologizing rural life in a way that he shows how hard a villager’s life is, despite all the nature and beauty that comes with a simple life. There is no idyllic scenery, there is only poverty and suppression from the people in power. Their hard work was never appreciated as it should have been, but through Gray’s poem they are given a voice, an identity, a memory of all the things they have done, and importance of every individual, even though it is portrayed through inscriptions on their graves. Gray takes all the details and motifs that were used in pastoral poetry, namely friendly animals and beautiful nature, but he contrasts them by showing the true rural lifestyle. The unequal distribution of wealth is described like weeds beneath the tall trees or thorns around roses, showing the unfair treatment of the poor peasants by the rich people (Rehman 97). The description of nature narrows to the graveyard in which the speaker stands, which

sets the sublime atmosphere that carries on through the poem, culminating with a grim, yet somehow hopeful conclusion that a peasant can only be truly at peace in death and afterlife.

## 2. Lament for the Idyllic Rural Life in Oliver Goldsmith's Poem

Oliver Goldsmith, born in Ireland, was a versatile writer. Even though not much of him was expected, since he did not excel in school, he wrote many essays, plays, articles, novels, and poems during his life. His writing style was "easy and pleasant" and his descriptions "shrewd", which is the trait that differentiates him from other poets of the eighteenth century (Greenblatt 2877).

One of Goldsmith's best known poems is "The Deserted Village", which is greatly influenced by the poet's experience of his own life in his birth place (Greenblatt 2877). In the beginning of the poem the speaker describes the village called Auburn, portraying it as a "loveliest village of the plain, / Where health and plenty cheered the laboring swain" (Goldsmith 1-2); a typical rural lifestyle, similar to Gray's description, where people worked hard and loved nature. He mentions "lovely bowers of innocence and ease, / Seats of my youth" (Goldsmith 5-6) in which he used to roam in his childhood, defining it with innocence, which was now clearly lost both for the speaker and the village. He continues describing all the farms, brooks, bushes, trees, and hills, and every mundane activity the villagers did, such as sports, dance, and singing, all of which were full of innocence; "those were thy charms, sweet village! Sports like these, / With sweet succession, taught even toil to please" (Goldsmith 31-32). With this quote the speaker admits that their lives were still full of struggle and hardships of the work with the land, but they found pleasure and happiness in small things that made even their hard work bearable. Those were its charms in speaker's memories, but "all these charms are fled" (Goldsmith 34) when the villagers had to move out due to the land enclosures by "the tyrant's hand" (Goldsmith 37) of the rich people. The village that the speaker remembers as a place abundant with nature and life was decaying under the influence of the "only master" who "grasps the whole domain" (Goldsmith 39) that was previously villagers' homeland and working ground. On the other hand, Hessel reads that verse as a reflection on colonialism: there was one master holding an abundant land that should have been serving its people, not the master, but it still produces "unwieldy wealth, and cumbrous pomp" that is in master's possession, which also ultimately rendered villagers in England landless (Hessel 643). The speaker is saddened upon realization that the village from his memories will never be there again:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
 Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;  
 Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;  
 A breath can make them, as a breath has made;  
 But a bold peasantry, their country's pride.  
 When once destroyed, can never be supplied. (Goldsmith 51-56)

The speaker sees the material wealth as a corruption of humanity; wherever wealth grows, humans decay. He emphasizes the irrelevance of wealthy individuals who enclosed the land by saying that they may flourish or fade, it will not matter; there will always come another corrupted one, but since peasantry is a community tightly connected, they can never be replaced or brought back together once disbanded and scattered. This is the main issue the speaker mentions; as much as he loves nature and scenery of the village, which is also gone as it was destroyed, he also cares deeply about the villagers. Again, he stresses the importance of the only virtues and necessities of life that are "innocence and health", but the most importantly "ignorance of wealth" (Goldsmith 61-62) as if wealth was a deadly sin that wrought destruction to everything the speaker held dear. As the speaker walks through the village and remembers his past, he shares his dream of returning to the village when he gets old and "to tell of all [he] felt, and all [he] saw" (Goldsmith 92), but, as he sees that his village has so drastically changed, he realizes that his wish "never must be [his]" (Goldsmith 98) and envies the one who owns the land. There is no sign of life, except for a lonely old woman:

All but yon widowed, solitary thing  
 That feebly bends beside the plashy spring;  
 She, wretched matron, forced, in age, for bread,  
 To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,  
 To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,  
 To seek her nightly shed, and weep till morn;  
 She only left of all the harmless train,  
 The sad historian of the pensive plain. (Goldsmith 129-136)

This description paints a poignant picture of hardships of life without care and help from others in an abandoned village, isolated and old. She is the only one left, the only one that still remembers how it used to be; she is the only connection between speaker's memories and harsh reality. Perhaps

she is also the final reassurance that the speaker's wish of retiring in his village can never come true as he would suffer the same gloomy fate. Apart from the lonely old lady, the speaker recalls a few other respected and kind former members of his village that led a good life, but now everything good is forgotten. However, he is still proud of their simple joys and happiness and does not care about rich people's disdain towards them, rather he emphasizes that "To [him] more dear, congenial to [his] heart, / One native charm, that all the gloss of art" (Goldsmith 253-254). He even questions rich people's choices: "And, even while fashion's brightest arts decoy, / The heart distrusting asks, if this be joy" (Goldsmith 263-264). With this quote he is, again, accusing wealth of corrupting people and blinding them to the true joy of the simple life, which makes them search for joy in "fashion's brightest arts decoy" that the speaker cannot believe is truly making them happy. He pleads that people see the truth and to "judge how wide the limits stand / Between a splendid and an happy land" (Goldsmith 267-268), confirming that wealth makes people too greedy and careless of other's well-being. The unfair difference is described in a comparison of peasants and rich man's material possessions; his robe, park, horses, and hounds replaced the land which was peasant's life, his work field and source of food: "The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth / Has robbed the neighboring fields of half their growth" (Goldsmith 279-280). But even in the city, a peasant will find no happiness as the speaker explains that "those joys the sons of pleasure know, / [are] extorted from his fellow creature's woe" (Goldsmith 313-314), and since poor people used to share everything and help each other, city's luxury life and wealth cannot make a villager truly happy, but still the speaker asks himself "Do thine, sweet Auburn, thine, the loveliest train, / Do thy fair tribes participate her pain" (Goldsmith 336-337) when referring to an old homeless lady, asking if she truly is alone in her misery, if the community of villagers is indeed disbanded. The speaker's accusation of luxury as the source of his village's hardships culminates in the following verses:

O luxury! Thou cursed by Heaven's decree,  
 How ill exchanged are things like these for thee!  
 How do thy portions, with insidious joy,  
 Diffuse their pleasures only to destroy! (Goldsmith 385-388)

These verses explain how all the luxury is created upon poor people's misery only to satisfy one rich man's wishes. The exchange is obviously unfair to the villagers as they suffer both for themselves through hard work, but also for the unknown rich who use them to the last drop. While pleasing

some people, it mostly destroys a lot of others. Being in that sad state, poor people lose their virtues, which saddens the speaker as he values them wholeheartedly. He can only hope that poetry finds its way to the villagers and rekindle their virtues in the darkest of times and that the “charming Nymph” guides them to a noble way. He says his goodbyes to the nymph, thanking her for being the “source of all [his] bliss, and all [his] woe, / That found’st [him] poor at first, and keep’st [him] so” (Goldsmith 413-414), implying that both his bliss and woe is being poor, but that he still wants it that way because virtue is found only in poor peasant life. Even though he parts with her, he hopes that peasants will once again hear her voice and return to their humble lifestyle and not be corrupted by the wealth, ending with a conclusion that every wealthy business will decay, as it was built on other’s misery, “While self-dependent power can time defy, / As rocks resist the billows and the sky” (Goldsmith 429-430). With this verse, he immortalizes villagers’ work, saying that it will always be needed, unlike the corporations and businesses that thrive on other people’s suffering, ending only in decay. Goldsmith emphasizes villagers’ virtues, but once they leave their land and work, they lose their virtues. This implies that Goldsmith sees peasants not as individual human beings, but tightly connected to the land and nature; without the land they become less virtuous, which questions Goldsmith’s representation of villagers (Kazmin 653).

Through this poem, Goldsmith tells a tale of grief and woe by describing the destruction of rural lifestyle. He valued simple village joys during his life, which translated to his poetry as well. Some religious aspects are seen in this poem, such as mentioning innocence as a form of a blessed state, which is contrasted to luxury that is described as a curse, feeding on the hardships of poor people. Speaker’s view of the village from his memories is a typical pastoral village; everything is simple, people are closely connected to nature, they help each other, but also work hard, painting a perfect age of innocence. The speaker, much like Goldsmith himself, wishes for that time to come back, and since the source of its destruction is wealth and luxury, cities and rich people are necessarily portrayed as evil. It could be said that the source of all evil in this world is the destruction of rural lifestyle, since he believes all virtues are contained in it, therefore blaming the advancement of technology and industry for the state at the time.



### 3. Complete demythologization of rural life in George Crabbe's poem

Similar to Goldsmith, George Crabbe was born in a village in a poor family. He started out as an apprentice to a surgeon, but eventually he published a lot of his literature, with the aid of Edmund Burke and Samuel Johnson. In his poem "The Village" he describes the truth, mocking the pastoral portrayals as well as Goldsmith's view of the village. This is the poem for people that prefer truth rather than an illusion (Greenblatt 1770).

At the very beginning, the speaker mocks the idealism that follows rural life by saying "What forms the real picture of the poor, / Demands a song – the Muse can give no more" (Crabbe 5-6), rejecting and denying even the possibility that there can be a cheerful ode written about the village. He even implies that those ideal times may have never existed: "Fled are those times, if e'er such times were seen" (Crabbe 7). Muses still sing of happy shepherds "because the Muses never knew their pains" (Crabbe 22), similar to pastoral poetry that was written by an outsider who never knew true life of a villager. Additionally, villagers were overwhelmed with work so they had no time "to number syllables and play with rhyme" (Crabbe 26). The speaker admits, though, that the beauty of nature cannot be denied, but only for people who had time to "gaze" upon it. They are not the ones that are tortured by physical work until exhaustion, those are true peasants:

But when amid such pleasing scenes I trace  
The poor laborious natives of the place,  
And see the mid-day sun, with fervid ray,  
On their bare heads and dewy temples play... (Crabbe 41-44)

This imagery shows that one can sure see the nature and its beauty that inspires him to write a poem, but it would not be the whole picture; the truth behind those fields and farms is the toil and struggle of peasants that work barely to survive. They are in the field in the middle of the day, when the sun shines the brightest, with sweat dripping down their unprotected heads, and yet their reward will not belong to them, but to someone who is of a "feeble head" and a "fainter heart" (Crabbe 45), collecting the fruits of their labor. Therefore, the speaker refuses to idealize and sing about an illusion, but rather to "paint the cot, / As truth will paint it, and as bards will not" (Crabbe 53-54),

again, confirming poets' false portrayals of villages. Even so, there is no poem or song that could help soothe a villager's pain, to them even the "smoothest song is smooth in vain" (Crabbe 56). Poets and poetry cannot help them survive and earn their daily bread, therefore they have no interest or time for it. Nature and its beauty, that poets praise, also will not help the poor ones for they do not need beauty; they need food and shelter, an assurance of survival for their children, yet even nature is not nurtured:

Where the thin harvest waves its withered ears;  
 Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,  
 Reign o'er the land and rob the blighted rye:  
 There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,  
 And to the ragged infant threaten war... (Crabbe 66-70)

This portrayal shows how scarce food in the village is. People work to extremes, and yet still their crops are overgrown by weeds or decaying due to blight. The war that thistles threaten to the infant is a war of abject poverty and helplessness, the last call to escape the decaying village that is left without hope of surviving. Weeds already "reign o'er the land", suppressing the scarce amount of crops they still have, showing signs that the village is already dead figuratively. The so-called nymph that Goldsmith so adores is described as a wretched figure, who once was an inspiration, but is now "betrayed by man, then left for man to scorn" (Crabbe 80). She still has some aspects of beauty, like her rosy cheeks, but it only distracts from the true toil that she hides. The nymph represents peasants and rural life, but in her true form; the speaker mentions her seemingly beautiful features, but those are the things poets like to drain for their poetry, leaving the sorrow and pain of the nymph in the shadows. All of the innocent sports after work and calm watchful shepherds are nowhere to be seen; they are too tired, sick, and poor to play and enjoy the evenings that Goldsmith describes. The speaker blames nature for the troubles of the poor: "Hers is the fault, if here mankind complain / Of fruitless toil and labor spent in vain" (Crabbe 133-134), but even when she "smiles for few", they feel like slaves with "wealth around them [that] makes them doubly poor" because so little of their work is rewarded; they can never be sure if their crops will grow or decay and be affected by blight. Health is also something that the poor are not blessed with; they spend their life laboring and suffering, "hoard[ing] up aches and anguish for their age" (Crabbe 151) only to die in agony and sickness. Since they are in poverty, their young are weak and tired, but their peasant's

pride will not let them abandon that way of life of constant work and suffering, so the cycle never ends. The speaker mocks all of those who think rural life is filled with ease and “smooth sonnets”, but even more so those who think there is peace in villager’s life. They can only find people full of sorrow and sentimentality for their youth, suffering in silence and awaiting their final hour. It seems that the only thing these poor people desire is death: “Why do I live, when I desire to be / At once from life and life’s long labour free” (Crabbe 209-210). The speaker expresses anger towards the rich people who use the villagers as cheap manpower, while they collect the results of their toil. He describes a place for sick and old people who are dying and wonders “how would ye bear in real pain to lie, / Despised, neglected, left alone to die” (Crabbe 260-261), referring to the rich people. Through these portrayals the speaker expresses deep sorrow for the way the economy and industry is treating peasants, adding a sense of hopelessness because their fates are only getting gloomier. It is even sadder that the rich are not even slightly affected by the scenes of all those sick people; they still hold their pride and posture “with looks unaltered by these scenes of woe” (Crabbe 280), as if he was looking at some damaged material wealth. When describing a poor man’s death, the speaker sees the graveyard as a place of “the happy dead, from trouble free” (Crabbe 325), and death as “the best of tyrants” (Crabbe 330). This leaves an impact on the reader to wonder what kind of life they had that death was their happy end, how mistreated they were by their bosses and businessmen. The last several lines of the poem describe the funeral of the poor man:

The busy priest, detained by weightier care,  
 Defers his duty till the day of prayer;  
 And, waiting long, the crowd retire distressed,  
 To think a poor man’s bones should lie unblessed. (Crabbe 345-348)

Little did the poor man have in his life, but even in his death his bones are not blessed to rest in peace. This leaves the crowd sad because it shows that they are extremely poor in every sense when even a simple blessing for an old man’s bones is postponed to another day. They did not get respect as human beings, they were seen only as a tool for rich people to achieve wealth.

George Crabbe goes to the raw truth of describing rural life, drawing the inspiration from his own experience. Similar to Gray, he feels sad for peasants, but unlike Gray, Crabbe blames both the economy of the rich people and nature itself. For Crabbe, there is nothing poetic or idyllic about rural life; there is only pain of working constantly and poverty due to the mistreatment of the

villagers. His poem expresses deep anger upon realization of what a villager's life came to be and utter hopelessness because he sees no sign of improvement of their status in society, mostly because no one respects peasants; they only seek better and cheaper ways to abuse them. This poem completely demythologizes rural life and invokes compassion and empathy in the reader, but also calls for action in making our society better and different than the poem describes.

## Conclusion

Rural life has been mythologized for a long time, serving as an inspiration for countless works of literature. In the eighteenth century it was time to write about truth and break the chain of false portrayals and illusions of villages. Gray, Goldsmith, and Crabbe brought the truth through their poems, although not in the same way or intensity. Since nature was one of the most influential features of rural life, Gray still glorifies rural nature in his poem, but speaks out for the deceased poor. His descriptions are a lament for the sad lives of poor, who live unnoticed and uncherished, only to die the same way, leaving their mark on their graves. Unlike Gray, Goldsmith highly mythologizes the village in which he grew up, but he is filled with sorrow and bitterness once he sees what has become of his childhood home. He still values peasants' hard work and simple joys, but does not glorify nature; for him, nature suffers along with villagers. Crabbe goes to the extreme truth and speaks ill of all rural features of life: villagers are tortured by work and disrespected, nature is to be blamed for peasants' poverty, the community is corrupt and, ultimately, there is not a single good feature about rural life in his time. These poems serve as a breaking point of continuous mythologizing of rural life that the pastoral poetry revolved around, showing a glimpse of dark reality that had been hidden for far too long.

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