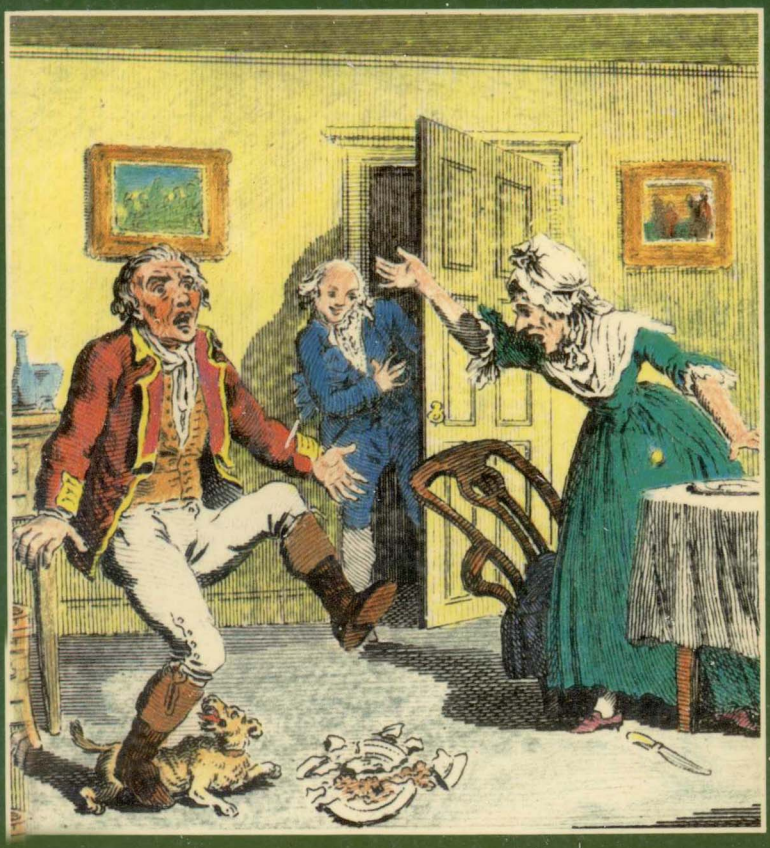
THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

TOBIAS SMOLLETT

THE EXPEDITION OF HUMPHRY CLINKER



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The Expedition of Humphry Clinker

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INTRODUCTION

The Expedition of Humphry Clinker is Smollett's final and best novel, long distinguished as being among the finest pieces of eighteenth-century fiction, and often regarded as the most successful epistolary novel in English.

Readers of this book will enjoy lively family letters, posted to various persons in England and Wales. Many are written to his doctor by a gouty country squire, Matthew Bramble; others by his husband-hunting sister, Tabitha, or by his youthful and sentimental niece, Lydia, or by her brother Jery, a student at Oxford. A few are composed by an illiterate but racy lady's-maid, Winifred Jenkins. They all gossip about each other, and they describe their own travelling adventures, and also those of a unique servant picked up *en route*, one Humphry Clinker, as well as those of a grotesque Scottish retired military officer called Lismahago. Very engrossing are these travellers' individual reactions to their tour through sections of England and Scotland. Their epistles include comments on social life, and memorable descriptions of well-known centres both urban and rural.

Viewing this extensive social panorama, one is carried back two centuries into the England and Scotland of about 1750–70. These two decades, like those preceding and following them, were far from peaceful, orderly, rational, or complacent. They were, in fact, turbulent, complex, and pregnant with momentous changes, the results of great advances in the sciences, and in exploration, commerce, and industry. Other changes, of course, were being effected in religion, philosophy, and all the arts. The novel (or the romance, as it was then called) had recently been born and was now growing up.

During these same decades of change and tension Tobias Smollett played his role, having left his native Scotland in 1739 to seek his fortune in London. He served in the navy and engaged in medical practice. He travelled in the Low Countries, and in France and Italy. His first two novels, *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle*, were published in 1748 and in 1751, and after many failures to stage his tragedy, *The Regicide*, he finally saw the

production of his farce, *The Reprisal*, at Drury Lane in 1757. His energy and the number of pages he prepared for the press were almost incredible: he became well known for his translations, his popular histories, his anti-Wilkes political weekly, and his large but unknown number of book reviews in the *Critical Review*, which he helped to establish and edit. This short survey of his career shows that he was no literary recluse and that he was very well qualified by experience to write his final masterpiece.

As to precisely when *Humphry Clinker* was outlined, written, and submitted for publication, nothing is certain. The best conjecture is that Smollett worked on it from about 1766 to 1770 as a welcome escape from the dull hackwork of editing his *Present State of All Nations* and revising the *Universal History*. During those years of miserable health he was in Scotland in the summer of 1766; in Bath, 1766–8, with brief excursions to London; and then in Italy, where he lived in various places—Pisa, Lucca Baths, Leghorn, and at his villa, 'Il Giardino', on Monte Nero a few miles from Leghorn. That Smollett may have been engaged for at least four years on *Humphry Clinker* is supported by two traditions: one Scottish, and the other Italian. William Fraser recorded in his *The Scotts of Buccleuch* (Edinburgh, 1878), that in 'the present mansion-house of Scotstoun, Tobias Smollett, the eminent novelist, while residing there with his sister, whose husband was the owner, made notes for his *Humphry Clinker*. One of the rooms is still called "Smollett's Study".' This statement, if true, indicates that Smollett visited his sister in 1766 and was then collecting material for his last novel. The Italian tradition that he wrote *Humphry Clinker* at his mountain villa in Antignano is firmly rooted in the fact that he lived there from 1770 until his death the following year. Very recently I enjoyed the hospitality provided by members of the Niccolai-Gamba family, the present owners of that villa, who showed me where Smollett worked (and where he died) in a very attractive room commanding a superb view of the Mediterranean.

In this 'romantic and salutary Situation', as Smollett described the site of 'Il Giardino', it is practically certain that he completed, with possible revisions, whatever portions of *Humphry Clinker* he had carried to Italy. 'It Galls me to the Soul', wrote his widow in 1773, 'when I think how much that poor Dear Man Suffered while he wrote that novel.' Nevertheless Smollett withstood his physical suffering and clung to his unusual gift of

humorous exaggeration, as is displayed in what he wrote in January 1771 to his friend Dr. John Hunter:

> With respect to myself, I have nothing to say, but that if I can prevail upon my wife to execute my last will, you shall receive my poor carcase in a box, after I am dead, to be placed among your rarities. I am already so dry and emaciated, that I may pass for an Egyptian mummy without any other preparation than some pitch and painted linen, unless you think I may deserve the denomination of a curiosity in my own character.

About a week after he dispatched this letter, a notice appeared in the *London Chronicle*, 19–22 January, that *Humphry Clinker* was in the press and scheduled for speedy publication. After a considerable delay it was issued about the middle of June 1771, in three volumes, priced at 9*s.* when bound, and printed for William Johnston in Ludgate Street, London, and Benjamin Collins of Salisbury. The first impression, it seems, consisted of some 1,500 copies, of which ten complimentary sets were sent to the author. These reached him, presumably, in July or August.

What is known of the initial reception of *Humphry Clinker* is worth a brief summary. In July 1771 an obscure literary friend of Smollett, one John Gray, then in London, wrote to him as follows:

> I have read the Adventures of Humphry Clinker with great delight, and think it calculated to give a very great run, and to add to the reputation of the author, who has, by the magic of his pen, turned the banks of Loch Lomond into classic ground . . . shallow judges, I find, are not so well satisfied with the performance as the best judges, who are lavish in its praises. Your half-animated sots say they don't see the humour. Cleland gives it the stamp of excellence, with the enthusiastic emphasis of voice and fist; and puts it before any thing you ever wrote. With many, I find, it has the effect of exciting inquiries about your other works which they had not heard of before.

It is a pity that Gray did not list, with the exception of Cleland, those he had in mind as the 'best judges', and his comments were doubtless selected partly to please his friend. In July 1771 it was too early for Gray to inform Smollett of the widespread publicity which his novel received, shown by the very large number of extracts printed in contemporary newspapers and magazines, both in London and Edinburgh. Many of these featured Bramble's accounts of social conditions in those cities, and also in Bath. It is extremely doubtful whether any previously published novel had comparable publicity. Liberal extracts were also presented by the

critics in their numerous reviews in 1771. In general, except for the writer in the *Critical Review*, their reactions were mixed: they praised the characterization and humour, but deplored the lack of action; they were puzzled by the title, presumably because Humphry Clinker is not the central figure, and some of them objected to what they felt to be gross, pseudo-Swiftian, and stercoraceous material. The article in the *Critical Review*, which Smollett founded and vitalized for seven years, was laudatory, as might be expected, and perceptive in pointing out Smollett's skill in achieving something new with the epistolary technique.

Aided by this unusual publicity and by Smollett's considerable reputation built up during two decades, *Humphry Clinker* remained until the 1830's a very popular novel, appealing both to the common reader and to leading writers. During those six decades it was printed in some forty separate editions, including an American imprint in 1813, and German, Dutch, Danish, Russian, and French translations. Then, of course, it was read in the eight-or-more separate collections of Smollett's works issued during this same period. Though outstripped in popularity by a few other novels, such as *Tom Jones* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the vogue of *Humphry Clinker* was impressive up to the beginning of the reign of Queen Victoria. From then on to the 1890's, despite the enthusiasm of Carlyle, Dickens, and others, Smollett's fame declined. Thackeray extravagantly praised the comic effects in *Humphry Clinker*, calling it 'the most laughable story that has ever been written since the goodly art of novel-writing began'. However, he was, to quote Mr. Fred W. Boege,[1] 'the first great novelist to insist on the supremacy of Fielding over Smollett', an appraisal soon echoed by lesser luminaries, and later by more influential ones. More important, however, was the Victorians' smug aversion to what they found indelicate or indecent in Smollett's fiction and also, it must be remembered, in that of Fielding and Sterne. This now archaic emphasis on a vaguely Victorian moral purity was carried on beyond the reign of the Queen.

A notable revival of interest in Smollett dates from the first decades of the present century. It started, apparently, with the rediscovery of his neglected *Travels through France and Italy*, as Mr. Boege has shown. In 1926 appeared the first collected edition of Smollett's letters, edited by Edward S. Noyes. Since the

[1] See under Select Bibliography.

publication of that volume, much published research, both biographical and critical, has made possible a clearer perception of Smollett's aims in satire, a more informed appreciation of his literary methods, and a more complete view of his dynamic personality, reflected in Matthew Bramble, the focal figure in *Humphry Clinker*. These contributions are useful in the attempt to formulate conclusions about Smollett's purposes, materials, and techniques.

No statements by Smollett or his friends or foes are available to throw any light on his impulses and aims in writing *Humphry Clinker*. Obviously he needed money, in addition to his wife's income, to live comfortably in Italy; it is not known whether the £210 which he received was a partial or a full payment for his final novel. Apart from financial considerations, it may well be assumed that he wrote it partly for the pleasure of self-expression, partly to publicize the merits of his native Scotland, and partly as an uncompromising moralist, hoping to effect through much social satire a bit of social reform. His occasionally personal satire, however, like that in his preceding novels, may well have been prompted by a supersensitive irritability, or the love of revenge. Mr. M. A. Goldberg's[1] theory that a central objective of Smollett was to present the theme of Primitivism versus Progress is very doubtful. Quite unsupported by facts is Mr. Donald Bruce's[1] recent assertion that Smollett in *Humphry Clinker* and elsewhere was expressing the point of view of a pugnacious, non-conforming radical, opposing Authority.

Whatever Smollett's central purposes may have been, they led him to select for the substance of his last novel varied and significant materials, some of which have relevance nearly two centuries later. As Louis Martz demonstrated some time ago, in his *The Later Career of Tobias Smollett*, one half of *Humphry Clinker* deals with details of contemporary social, economic, and political history in specific topographical settings (Bath, London, Edinburgh, and the Scottish Highlands), all most accurately and graphically described in the journalistic portions of the letters of Bramble, Jery Melford, and others in a family party of Welsh tourists. Along with such scene-painting there is a colourful portrait-gallery of contemporary celebrities (artists, actors, medical men, politicians, and minor literary figures), some satirized, and others eulogized—chiefly depicted in the epistles of Bramble and Melford. In certain places,

[1] See under Select Bibliography.

Smollett's own political beliefs (those of a Tory in the 1760's) are clearly expounded, and Professor Byron Gassman has recently shown how these views, such as those concerning the abuse of the liberty of the press, the menace of an unthinking mob, and the value of a strong and benevolent monarch are all a logical extension of what Smollett had advocated earlier in his historical and in his political writings. Another seemingly personal motif in *Humphry Clinker* is a strong love of the virtues of country life as opposed to the socially corrupting luxury and affluence of urban existence. Unquestionably personal material is found in the pages on Pauncefort, and in those revealing Smollett as host on Sundays to typical Grub-street authorlings, who elude identification.

To turn to predominantly fictional material, *Humphry Clinker*, in contrast to Smollett's earlier novels, has relatively little of the picaresque. Apart from numerous comic incidents, and several episodes designed to arouse pathos, there are the three loosely threaded love stories which more than fill the minimum requirement demanded by those who purchased fiction in 1771. And finally there is in *Humphry Clinker* a certain amount of Swiftian scatalogical material, introduced with what might be called inclusive realism. This was partly derived from Smollett's medical experience and partly from the inescapable and offensive odours two centuries ago (both outdoors and indoors), odours to which a supersensitive Bramble was vulnerable. Clearly enough, Smollett was only one of a number of eighteenth-century writers dealing out indelicate olfactory images, a fact which Mr. Philip Stevick illustrates in his recent article, 'The Augustan Nose'.[1]

Significant material plus effective techniques plus an indefinable but vital dash of the author's personality—all these are prerequisites for the literary work which is to outlive its era. Of course, excellent writers other than Smollett have taken liberties with set patterns. In *Humphry Clinker* Smollett followed only in general the epistolary form of Richardson's widely read novels, *Pamela*, which appeared in 1740, and *Clarissa*, his masterpiece, published in 1748. Smollett, influenced partly by Christopher Anstey's verse-epistles in his *New Bath Guide*, 1766, decided to write his own epistolary fiction. In doing so, he radically altered Richardson's technique: instead of utilizing one letter-writer, he introduced a

[1] P. Stevick, 'The Augustan Nose', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. xxxiv, Jan. 1965.

group of them, who present multiple points of view, not only disclosing personal problems and moods, but also revealing their response to events, places, persons, and ideas occasioned by their travels.

Through the *persona* of Bramble, the central letter-writer, Smollett revealed much of his own personality. Bramble is also the centripetal force effecting a kind of unity, although the conventional narrative strands are often disconnected and submerged, towards the end of the novel, beneath masses of essay-material. The revelation of Clinker's parentage and the concluding weddings are more like technical gestures than serious manipulations of dramatic technique. The end-products of Smollett's characterization are mainly static rather than dynamic, although Bramble experiences amusing shifts in moods and social attitudes. As usual in Smollett's fiction, there is entertaining Hogarthian caricature represented by such grotesques as Tabitha and Lismahago. This device of comic exaggeration is also exploited in the creation of extraordinary verbal distortions so conspicuous in the letters of Winifred Jenkins. These verbal tricks are more subtle than the comic errors of Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop, and, as Mr. Giorgio Melchiori has noted, they approach the diction invented by Joyce in his *Finnegans Wake*. Smollett utilizes other comic devices, such as contradictions, juxtapositions, and subtle contrasts not only in the handling of incidents but also in characterization; these have been recently explored by M. Paul-Gabriel Boucé.[1] There is also some evidence to support the theory advanced by Mr. Sheridan Baker,[1] that *Humphry Clinker* is, in spots, a comic romance; its very title, like Sterne's title, *Tristram Shandy*, embodies a clever juxtaposition of names connoting both the chivalric and its opposite.

Some of the preceding statements concerning Smollett's techniques will doubtless need revision in the future. They should be considered, however, by those who scorn Prefaces and 'Afterwords', as well as by those who consult Introductions, as aids in appreciating *Humphry Clinker*. That this is today a widely read eighteenth-century novel is obvious in view of its many editions recently published in English-speaking countries; a Russian translation was printed in Moscow in 1953, and a French translation was issued in Paris in 1955. Widespread popularity is not always a true index of excellence, but a novel still in demand after

[1] See under Select Bibliography.

nearly two centuries is 'one out of thousands', and one with enduring literary qualities.

Some of these merits, such as the entertainment found in the familiar letters written by Bramble and his party, have already been touched upon, but these letters might well have been only mediocre travel-literature from the hand of one lacking Smollett's rare gift of humour—humour in describing episodes, and in handling the styles of the letters so as to endow Winifred, Tabitha, and Lydia, as well as Jery, with some degree of acceptable realism; and what is more important, to create the memorable Matthew Bramble, the embodiment of much of Smollett himself, and the vital centre of the whole novel. The Smollettian Bramble is, himself, much addicted to satire. This adds social significance and a 'cutting edge' to *Humphry Clinker*, which offers much more than fictional entertainment. What Smollett satirized (the unsanitary conditions in Bath and in London, and bad food and drink, for example,) was important in the 1760's and is not wholly irrelevant today. Even more pertinent to his society were Bramble's satirical indictments of widespread social and political corruption, still matters of concern in many areas of modern affluence. Bramble, like Smollett, is a sharp observer of social evils, analyses them in the manner of an eighteenth-century rationalist, and at the same time is emotionally indignant over them. He would welcome reforms, but how actively he would work to effect them is perhaps questionable. In the latter part of the novel Bramble is greatly concerned about the virtues of country life as opposed to the corrupt luxuries of urban living. This is illustrated at length in the digressive accounts of the Baynards and the Dennisons. For some readers these expositions may be dull, but it is natural that these problems interested Bramble, a Welsh country squire. Smollett himself loved an Arcadia, whether it was English, Scottish, or Italian.

Whether or not one appreciates these digressions, *Humphry Clinker* is filled to the brim with appealing variety. There are wide-ranging allusions to literature, the arts, the sciences, social history, and places and persons, which is not surprising in view of Smollett's extensive reading and travels. There is also variety in his prose, which, in whatever way it functions, is admirable in its clarity and rhythms, though some readers may well find it, in some places, a little too contrived in its use of doublets, triplets, and parallel and balanced constructions.

Surely the most comprehensive and enduring excellence of *Humphry Clinker* is its realism, its truth to life. In his preface to the French translation published by Gallimard in 1955, Jean Giono declares: 'Satire parfaite de l'homme, *Humphry Clinker* est la vie même. Il n'y a pas d'aventures, sinon celles de tous les jours.' This statement holds true for almost everything in the realistic world of Bramble and his fellow travellers. Those who relish incisive personal and social satire, memorable characters, and hilarious comedy will continue to find much to admire in Smollett's final novel, and his most impressive achievement.

L. M. K.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

EXCEPT for the elimination of the long 's', and the correction of obvious typographical errors (apart from misspelled words in the letters of Tabitha Bramble and Winifred Jenkins), the present text follows that of the editor's own copy of what appears to be the 'A-Text', described in some detail by Franklin B. Newman. (See his article listed below under Special Studies.) According to Mr. Newman, it is almost certain that this 'A-Text' was the first one printed in 1771, and made available to the public in three volumes, the first volume being misdated 1671. See also Parreaux, p. xxxv.

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First edition, June 1771, almost certainly the imprint referred to as the 'A-text' by F. B. Newman (see *supra*). For other editions of 1771 and 1772, see Newman and *NCBEL*. For illustrated editions see *NCBEL*, G. Sutherland (*supra*), and *The National Union Catalogue, Pre-1956 Imprints*, vol. 552 (1978), 536–40. Included in all major editions of Smollett's *Works*, such as those by R. Anderson (1796); J. Moore (1797); T. Roscoe (1841); D. Herbert (1870); J. P. Browne (1872); W. E. Henley

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NB: nearly all modern studies listed above deal with *Humphry Clinker* at varying length. The fullest analysis of the novel's epistolary structure will be found in P.-G. Boucé, *The Novels of T. Smollett* (1976) – cited as 'Boucé' in the Notes – pp. 191–251.

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