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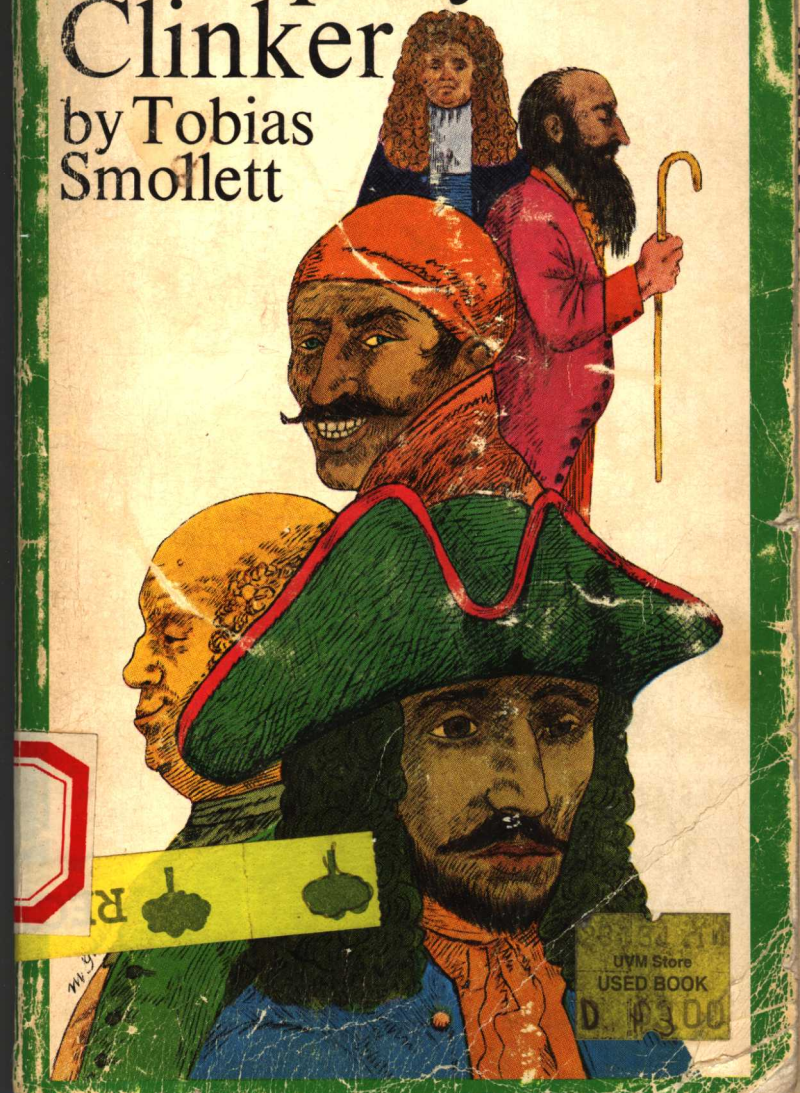
Humphry Clinker

by Tobias Smollett



Humphry Clinker

by Tobias Smollett

With the sharp sensitivity of "a man without skin" Tobias Smollett humorously attacked the frivolity and foibles of eighteenth-century England. *Humphry Clinker* is his mirthful tale of a tour by coach and four through cities and countryside. Five people embark on the journey: the crusty eccentric, Squire Bramble; his husband-hunting sister, Tabitha; her maid, Winifred; and Bramble's youthful niece and nephew, Lydia and Jery. En route they are joined by Humphry Clinker, an honest Wiltshire lad of tattered cloth and empty purse. As misadventure follows misadventure, each character reveals his true self by giving his own conflicting view of the incidents, places, and people encountered along the way. The result is an entertaining and realistic picture of that wonderful age when gentlemen duelled, ladies swooned, and servants rose from rags to riches.

With a Foreword by Monroe Engel

TOBIAS SMOLLETT

THE EXPEDITION OF HUMPHRY CLINKER

WITH A FOREWORD BY
MONROE ENGEL

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Tobias Smollett's importance in the history of the English novel is somewhat obscured by the fact that the novel on which his claims can best stand, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker,* is also his last, completed only shortly before his death in 1771. Written rather late for a debut, *Humphry Clinker* is also too radically unlike Smollett's earlier novels to serve as a dignifying climax to them—as revelation, that is, of a direction in which those earlier novels were tending all the time. Yet if we compare *Humphry Clinker* to the earlier novels, we can see something of the nature of the change it represents, as well as the gross size of that change; specifically, we can see how at the end of his life Smollett broke free from his picaresque models, creating instead a fully domesticated English novel that fitted his own genius and his view of the world in tone, subject matter, and narrative form, and that was to provide a broadly useful and comprehensible influence for English novelists who followed him. For no Protestant Englishman of the eighteenth or nineteenth century was likely to find in brutal poverty the allegorical value with which, for example, the sixteenth century Catholic author of *Lazarillo de Tormes,* possibly the greatest of the Spanish picaresque novels, certainly was able to endow it. For the Englishman, poverty was more likely to seem a disgrace to be obliterated than a permanent condition of terrestrial life.

In *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle,* Smollett often seems to be trying to put peculiarly English content into a somewhat derived form in which it has little integral place. It takes a very special taste to read these novels with any great pleasure today. The brutal world they picture, in which a beating and a seduction are equal fun and equally unfelt, is not so much masculine as nearly meaningless. According to Dickens, who owed much to Smollett, the way of the early Smollett novels, though he admired them, was "a way without tenderness," and he much preferred *Humphry Clinker* to them precisely because it had this quality of tenderness that they lacked. Not many serious modern readers

are likely, for better and worse, to couch their literary judgments in such moral terms. Yet moral and literary judgments are not necessarily exclusive, either, and if we take suppleness, say, to be a literary and even a technical equivalent for Dickens's "tenderness," we can perhaps justify his judgment.

Suppleness in this sense should suggest something about the encompassing view of life behind the novel, and specifically about the range of the criteria of pertinence it invokes and employs. By taking formal account of the complexity and variety of the world, instead of trying much of the time to force experience into a brutally simple scheme of revenge and success, Smollett becomes marvelously interesting and original. In his new mode, he is able to create an inclusive moral universe that has telling relation still to the universe in which we live two hundred years later. In this instance then, at least, it does seem that we can talk about imaginative force and moral force almost interchangeably. And if we add that *Humphry Clinker* still gives great pleasure, too, we have made substantial claims for the book, since the assumption that even the greatest art gives pleasure for all time is probably pious.

Humphry Clinker is an epistolary novel—a novel composed entirely in letters. It differs significantly from many epistolary novels, including both *Pamela* and *Clarissa Harlowe,* in that the letter-writers in this novel all really try to tell the truth as they see it, rather than give partial testimony for purposes of persuasion or self-protection. Each of these correspondents writes to an absolute peer, an equal in age, station, and view of life: Matthew Bramble to his old friend and physician, Dr. Lewis; Jery Melford to his college mate Phillips; Lydia to her school friend Laetitia Willis (and, a partial exception, a few letters to her former guardian); Win Jenkins to another maid, Mary Jones. Only Tabitha Bramble writes to an inferior, the housekeeper, Mrs. Gwyllim (plus one letter to Dr. Lewis, who is her superior in every way), and this lack of a peer to write to exaggerates her natural harshness, giving her letters their distinctively raucous tone in a novel in which the characteristic tone is one of sweet equality. Each of the writers, with the exception of Tabitha, then, is a free, limpid medium for narration, and the resultant varying and overlapping points of view through which the story is told give an effect of multiple truth that we are likely to associate only with more recent experiments in the novel.

There is a simple relation between the importance of characters in *Humphry Clinker* and the number of letters they

write. Matthew and Jery have about two-thirds of the letters between them. Another way to say this is that each of the men writes as many letters as the three women together. It is still, as in his earlier novels, the masculine world that interests Smollett, though masculinity here is a more complex—or, again, supple—and interesting concept. The book is concerned, in fact, as much as with anything else, with what constitutes responsible, mature masculinity. The two men are the developing characters. The women are relatively fixed, and representative: the romantic girl; the termagant; the healthy flesh. Yet to categorize Win Jenkins too insistently would be a certain proof of disqualification. The point about Win Jenkins' language, too, is not that it is pretentious and full of unintentional *double entendre*, so much as that these analyzable mistakes in English—social and psychic—finally become a language of pathos and celebration that almost defies rational analysis.

To see how the richness of multiple narration is affected, any one of several incidents will serve. Take, for example, Matthew's accident with the bathing machine at Scarborough. The account starts with Bramble's telling Dr. Lewis that the party is going to Scarborough, where he will seek to better his health by sea bathing. This introduction of events by Bramble is more or less customary, a formal reflection of the decorum of the society, since Bramble, as the responsible senior member of the party, is the one who determines its movements. Next Jery, who has the broad and comparatively shallow interests of an unformed young man on tour, describes Scarborough in general, and the peculiar and therefore potentially interesting use of bathing machines in particular. Then Bramble tells of the actual misadventure in a way that establishes not only the events, but a good deal, too, about his excitable and compassionate character, his sense of justice, and his great regard for propriety. Here, too, we are engaged directly to the sufferer, seeing the tempest from inside the teapot. Jery then gives an account of the same events, in which the events themselves are in no way altered, but our view of them is amplified, because we now see that comic side of Bramble's passion and dignity that Bramble himself cannot see. So the event is given a final illumination of comedy, but of comedy that is not reductive, in part just because it is not the only view.

Another good example is provided by the account of the rivalry between Humphry and Dutton, "the young 'squire's wally de shamble," for the favor of Winifred. Again the mat-

ter is introduced by Bramble, with a passing mention that this rivalry is going on that places it rather below his real attention. Then Jery, still the callow young man, recounts the actual events of the rivalry as farce. His attitude toward his inferiors, suggesting that he believes them incapable of real feeling, contrasts him to Bramble, who believes in the reality of his inferiors and their feelings, but believes also in the fitness of class separation. When Winifred next recounts the same events, this does not lessen the comedy, surely, but adds to the comedy the sense of genuine human involvement. Comedy, which serves as correction in the bathing-machine incident, here must itself be corrected.

The beauty of this technique is that it allows reconsideration and augmentation without any loss of interest, for as each character gives his view of the same events, the story begins to lie as much in the discrepancies as in the similarities and repetitions. This importance of discrepancy—and also of what is unsaid—relates interestingly if not inevitably to the naming of the novel for the one major character in it who writes no letters, has no voice.

Yet it is the nature or character of Humphry, more certainly than his silence, that must have induced Smollett to use his name for the title. The title places this novel beside Smollett's earlier novels, for Humphry, like Roderick Random, for example, rises from unjust poverty, loneliness, and obscurity to comfort, a wife, and a place in the world. He is, that is, in the tradition of the English picaresque hero, though the ways he differs from the earlier picaresque heroes are more interesting than the ways in which he resembles them. The novel has, besides, a more interesting form and movement than the conventional and too often mechanical rise from rags to riches lends to most of the English picaresque novels. This form involves a group of related narrative movements or progressions: the progress of Matthew Bramble to spiritual as well as physical health; the several progressions to marriage—Lydia to Wilson, Tabitha to Lismahago, Win to Humphry; the movement toward understanding between Jery and Bramble.

This *rapprochement* between uncle and nephew, less immediately obvious than the other movements within the book, is of the greatest importance. At the beginning, the old man and the young man are completely out of sympathy. By the end, they are not only in complete sympathy, but we understand that Jery is to be Bramble's intellectual and spiritual as well as financial heir. Bramble discovers two sons in the novel

—Humphry, the illegitimate son of his loins, and Jery, the legitimate son of his spirit. Jery is finally as ready to recognize this spiritual kinship with his uncle as Humphry is to recognize the physical kinship. Coincidentally, he is ready also to assume his maturity. This is shown by his changing attitude toward the other characters in the novel, as well as toward his uncle. It is shown, too, by his changing attitude toward marriage. But its most interesting manifestation is formal—toward the end of the novel, Jery begins to take over from Bramble the function of chief narrator.

It is pleasant and not altogether surprising that after his earlier novels of violence and brutality, Smollett should have written at the end of his life a story of reconciliation. What *is* surprising is that the novel has such vitality. For it is easy to be a yea-sayer, but very hard to be an imaginative and convincing one. And Smollett has gone all the way here—good people, happiness, justice, all the rewards of the flesh and spirit. Life is not all this way, we know, yet we consent to the novel without any sense of indulging in child's play. It is hard to say why. Imaginative consistency and imaginative energy have something to do with it, and perhaps the testimony that is all through the book that the happiness of the world is as fragile as it is marvelous, and that this fragility brings comedy and pathos very close together. The quintessencé of the point of view resides in the language of Win Jenkins. R.P. Blackmur has used her as the chief example of what he calls "the language of silence," that poetry of sensation and aspiration that lies so expressively sometimes within the translucent shell of apparent inarticulateness. And it is Win Loyd, nee Jenkins, who has the last word here:

> Providinch hath been pleased to make great halteration in the pasture of our affairs.——We were yesterday three kiple chined, by the grease of God, in the holy bands of mattermoney, and I now subscrive myself Loyd at your sarvice. . . . Now, Mrs. Mary, our satiety is to suppurate—.

This positive vision is informed by profound knowledge of the world.

Monroe Engel
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

To *Mr. Henry Davis, Bookseller, in London.*

Abergavenny, Aug. 4.

Respected Sir,

I have received your esteemed favour of the 13th ultimo, whereby it appeareth, that you have perused those same Letters, the which were delivered unto you by my friend the reverend Mr. Hugo Behn; and I am pleased to find you think they may be printed with a good prospect of success; in as much as the objections you mention, I humbly conceive, are such as may be redargued, if not entirely removed—And, first, in the first place, as touching what prosecutions may arise from printing the private correspondence of persons still living, give me leave, with all due submission, to observe, that the Letters in question were not written and sent under the seal of secrecy; that they have no tendency to the *mala fama*, or prejudice of any person whatsoever; but rather to the information and edification of mankind; so that it becometh a sort of duty to promulgate them *in usum publicum*. Besides, I have consulted Mr. Davy Higgins, an eminent attorney of this place, who, after due inspection and consideration, declareth, That he doth not think the said Letters contain any matter which will be held actionable in the eye of the law. Finally, if you and I should come to a right understanding, I do declare *in verbo sacerdotis*, that, in case of any such prosecution, I will take the whole upon my own shoulders, even *quoad* fine and imprisonment, though, I must confess, I should not care to undergo flagellation: *Tam ad turpitudinem, quam ad amaritudinem pœna spectans*—Secondly, concerning the personal resentment of Mr. Justice Lismahago, I may say, *non flocci facio*—I would not willingly vilipend any Christian, if, peradventure, he deserveth that epithet: albeit, I am much surprised that more care is not taken to exclude from the commission all such vagrant foreigners as may be justly suspected of disaffection to our happy constitution, in church and state—God forbid that I should be so uncharitable, as to affirm positively, that the said Lismahago is no better than a Jesuit in disguise; but this

I will assert and maintain, *totis viribus*, that, from the day he qualified, he has never been once seen *intra templi parietes*, that is to say, within the parish church.

Thirdly, with respect to what passed at Mr. Kendal's table, when the said Lismahago was so brutal in his reprehensions, I must inform you, my good sir, that I was obliged to retire, not by fear arising from his minatory reproaches, which, as I said above, I value not of a rush; but from the sudden effect produced by a barbel's row, which I had eaten at dinner, not knowing, that the said row is at certain seasons violently cathartic, as Galen observeth in his chapter περὶ ἰχθύς.

Fourthly, and lastly, with reference to the manner in which I got possession of these Letters, it is a circumstance that concerns my own conscience only; sufficeth it to say, I have fully satisfied the parties in whose custody they were; and, by this time, I hope I have also satisfied you in such ways, that the last hand may be put to our agreement, and the work proceed with all convenient expedition; in which hope I rest,

Respected sir,
Your very humble servant,
Jonathan Dustwich.

P.S. I propose, *Deo volente*, to have the pleasure of seeing you in the great city, towards All-hallowtide, when I shall be glad to treat with you concerning a parcel of MS. sermons, of a certain clergyman deceased; a cake of the right leaven, for the present taste of the public. *Verbum sapienti, &c:*

J. D.

To *the Revd. Mr. Jonathan Dustwich, at*——.

Sir,

I received yours in course of post, and shall be glad to treat with you for the MS. which I have delivered to your friend Mr. Behn; but can by no means comply with the terms proposed. Those things are so uncertain—Writing is all a lottery—I have been a loser by the works of the greatest men of the age – I could mention particulars, and name names; but don't chuse it—The taste of the town is so changeable. Then there have been so many letters upon travels lately published—What between Smollett's, Sharp's, Derrick's, Thickness's, Baltimore's, and Baretti's, together with Shandy's Sen-

timental Travels, the public seems to be cloyed with that kind of entertainment—Nevertheless, I will, if you please, run the risque of printing and publishing, and you shall have half the profits of the impression—You need not take the trouble to bring up your sermons on my account—No body reads sermons but Methodists and Dissenters—Besides, for my own part, I am quite a stranger to that sort of reading; and the two persons, whose judgment I depended upon in those matters, are out of the way; one is gone abroad, carpenter of a man of war; and the other has been silly enough to abscond, in order to avoid a prosecution for blasphemy—I'm a great loser by his going off—He has left a manual of devotion half finished on my hands, after having received money for the whole copy—He was the soundest divine, and had the most orthodox pen of all my people; and I never knew his judgment fail, but in flying from his bread and butter on this occasion.

By owning you was not put in bodily fear by Lismahago, you preclude yourself from the benefit of a good plea, over and above the advantage of binding him over. In the late war, I inserted in my evening paper, a paragraph that came by the post, reflecting upon the behaviour of a certain regiment in battle. An officer of said regiment came to my shop, and, in the presence of my wife and journeyman, threatened to cut off my ears——As I exhibited marks of bodily fear more ways than one, to the conviction of the bye-standers, I bound him over; my action lay, and I recovered. As for flagellation, you have nothing to fear, and nothing to hope, on that head—There has been but one printer flogged at the cart's tail these thirty years; that was Charles Watson; and he assured me it was no more than a flea-bite. C— S— has been threatened several times by the House of L—; but it came to nothing. If an information should be moved for, and granted against you, as the editor of those Letters, I hope you will have honesty and wit enough to appear and take your trial——If you should be sentenced to the pillory, your fortune is made—As times go, that's a sure step to honour and preferment. I shall think myself happy if I can lend you a lift; and am, very sincerely,

Yours,
Henry Davis.

London, Aug. 10th.

Please my kind service to your neighbour, my cousin Madoc—I have sent an Almanack and Court-kalendar, di-

rected for him at Mr. Sutton's, bookseller, in Gloucester, carriage paid, which he will please to accept as a small token of my regard. My wife, who is very fond of toasted cheese, presents her compliments to him, and begs to know if there's any of that kind, which he was so good as to send us last Christmas, to be sold in London.

H. D.

THE EXPEDITION OF HUMPHRY CLINKER

To Dr. Lewis.

Doctor,

The pills are good for nothing – I might as well swallow snow-balls to cool my reins – I have told you over and over, how hard I am to move; and at this time of day, I ought to know something of my own constitution. Why will you be so positive? Prithee send me another prescription – I am as lame and as much tortured in all my limbs as if I was broke upon the wheel: indeed, I am equally distressed in mind and body – As if I had not plagues enough of my own, those children of my sister are left me for a perpetual source of vexation – what business have people to get children to plague their neighbours? A ridiculous incident that happened yesterday to my niece Liddy, has disordered me in such a manner, that I expect to be laid up with another fit of the gout – perhaps, I may explain myself in my next. I shall set out to-morrow morning for the Hot Well at Bristol, where I am afraid I shall stay longer than I could wish. On the receipt of this, send Williams thither with my saddle-horse and the *demi pique*. Tell Barnes to thresh out the two old ricks, and send the corn to market, and sell it off to the poor at a shilling a bushel under market price. – I have received a sniveling letter from Griffin, offering to make a public submission and pay costs. I want none of his submissions; neither will I pocket any of his money – The fellow is a bad neighbour, and I desire to have nothing to do with him: but as he is purse-proud, he shall pay for his insolence: let him give five pounds to the poor of the parish, and I will withdraw my action; and in the mean time you may tell Prig to stop proceedings. – Let Morgan's widow have the Alderney cow, and forty shillings to clothe her children: but don't say a syllable of

the matter to any living soul – I'll make her pay when she is able. I desire you will lock up all my drawers, and keep the keys till meeting; and be sure you take the iron chest with my papers into your own custody. – Forgive all this trouble from,

Dear Lewis,
Your affectionate
M. Bramble.

Gloucester, April 2.

To Mrs. Gwyllim, house-keeper at Brambleton-hall.

Mrs. Gwyllim,

When this cums to hand, be sure to pack up in the trunk male that stands in my closet, to be sent me in the Bristol waggon without loss of time, the following articles, viz. my rose collard neglejay, with green robins, my yellow damask, and my black velvet suit, with the short hoop; my bloo quilted petticot, my green manteel, my laced apron, my French commode, Macklin head and lappets, and the litel box with my jowls. Williams may bring over my bum-daffee, and the viol with the easings of Dr. Hill's dock-water, and Chowder's lacksitif. The poor creature has been terribly constuprated ever since we left huom. Pray take particular care of the house while the family is absent. Let there be a fire constantly kept in my brother's chamber and mine. The maids, having nothing to do, may be sat a spinning. I desire you'll clap a pad-luck on the wind-seller, and let none of the men have excess to the strong bear—don't forget to have the gate shit every evening before dark. – The gardnir and the hind may lie below in the landry, to partake the house, with the blunderbuss and the great dog; and I hope you'll have a watchfull eye over the maids. I know that hussy, Mary Jones, loves to be rumping with the men. Let me know if Alderney's calf be sould yet, and what he fought—if the ould goose be sitting; and if the cobler has cut Dicky, and how the pore anemil bore the operation.—No more at present, but rests,

Yours,
Tabitha Bramble.

Glostar, April 2.

To Mrs. Mary Jones, at Brambleton-hall.

Dear Molly,

Heaving this importunity, I send my love to you and Saul, being in good health, and hoping to hear the same from you; and that you and Saul will take my poor kitten to bed with you this cold weather.—We have been all in a sad taking here at Glostar – Miss Liddy had like to have run away with a player-man, and young master and he would adone themselves a mischief; but the squire applied to the mare, and they were bound over.—Mistress bid me not speak a word of the matter to any Christian soul – no more I shall: for, we servints should see all and say nothing—But what was worse than all this, Chowder has had the misfortune to be worried by a butcher's dog, and came home in a terrible pickle—Mistress was taken with the asterisks, but they soon went off. The doctor was sent for to Chowder, and he subscribed a repository, which did him great service—thank God he's now in a fair way to do well – pray take care of my box and the pillyber, and put them under your own bed; for, I do suppose, madam Gwyllim will be a prying into my secrets, now my back is turned. John Thomas is in good health, but sulky. The squire gave away an ould coat to a poor man; and John says as how tis robbing him of his parquisites. —I told him, by his agreement he was to receive no vails; but he says as how there's a difference betwixt vails and parquisites; and so there is for sartain. We are all going to the Hot Well, where I shall drink your health in a glass of water, being,

Dear Molly,

Your humble servant to command,

Wm. Jenkins.

Glostar, April 2d.