



## The Expedition of Humphry Clinker

*Tobias Smollett*

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Offers a picture of eighteenth-century society. This story describes Squire Bramble's tour of the Britain of George III.

### **The Expedition of Humphry Clinker Details**

Date : Published 1967 by Penguin (first published 1771)

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Author : Tobias Smollett

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## From Reader Review The Expedition of Humphry Clinker for online ebook

### Jan-Maat says

Novel in letters recounting the travels of a family group through England and Scotland featuring the servant (and occasional Methodist lay preacher) they pick up on their way, the eponymous Humphrey Clinker.

Apart from eighteenth-century humour the novel has an unusual Celtic theme for example the Welsh origin of the family and significance of Edinburgh as archetypal 'big city' and in the slightly Don Quixote-like character of the Scottish Officer they pick up in Edinburgh.

One of the few novels whose resolution turns on Welsh inheritance law. Not then your typical eighteenth century novel.

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### Bettie? says

[bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

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### Fuchsia Groan says

Divertidísima novela epistolar en la que acompañamos a Mr. Brumble y su hipocondría, a sus familiares y a sus respectivos criados a través de buena parte de Inglaterra y Escocia en busca de la cura a sus males.

A través de las cartas que envían, conocemos a cada uno, todos perfectamente retratados, por lo que cuentan y por cómo lo cuentan, las diferentes visiones de un mismo hecho o situación, Smollett era sin duda alguna un gran narrador.

Con mucho humor, absurdo a veces, pero crítico e incisivo otras, te acerca a la realidad social del momento de manera amena, a las costumbres, con mucha crítica y mala leche, hacia escritores, prensa, políticos (*...aunque es preciso reconocer que no es ningún hipócrita. No finge tener virtud alguna y no se esfuerza en disimular su carácter. Su ministerio contará con una ventaja, no decepcionará a nadie cuando incumpla sus promesas, pues ningún mortal confía en su palabra*), votantes (*Si todos los electores recapacitaran y obrasen en conciencia no tendríamos razones para quejarnos de la venalidad de los parlamentos. Pero no somos más que un hatajo de canallas inmorales y corruptos, tan desprovistos del menor sentido de la honradez y la bondad, que estoy convencido de que, en poco tiempo, solo se considerarán infamias la virtud y el civismo*), la humanidad entera.

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### Alex says

"The pills are good for nothing," fumes the heroic hypochondriac Bramble in one of your better opening sentences, and we're off on a picaresque tour of all the clichés of the 1700s and 1800s. Featuring such greatest hits as:

- Ridiculous coincidences!
- People who turn out to be of higher birth than they seem!
- Casual anti-Semitism, racism, sexism and classism!
- Duels!
- Fainting!

Published in 1771, it was influential to writers of the 1800s and especially influential to Dickens, whose alter ego David Copperfield at one point lists his favorite literary characters and most of them are from Smollett. You can see the influence: Smollett has a flair for caricatures, although Dickens has more of one.

It's an epistolary - of *course* it's an epistolary - and Smollett uses that structure to show the same events from several different points of view. That's a cool idea, but Smollett can't execute it well enough to keep it interesting. The maid, for example, has one joke: the misuse of words like "suppository" to dirty effect. It gets old even to a 13-year-old like me.

And yet it's all sortof likable. Don Quixote shows up, or close enough. And there's this, from a quack doctor: "Every person who pretended to nauseate the smell of another's excretions, snuffed up his own with particular complacency." So that's maybe the first recorded instance of the maxim that everyone likes the smell of their own shit. And (like my shit) the book is not great, but pleasant enough.

Clinker himself is a minor character, introduced late, which confused me enough that I had to stop 20% through and confirm I was reading the right book. The major characters are:

- Mr. Bramble, the hypochondriac from above;
- His sister Tabitha Bramble, fast becoming a spinster of no return and desperate to marry;
- Her maid Winifred Jenkins, she of the one joke;
- The Bramble nephew Jery Melford, a pleasant but rowdy young man;
- His sister Lydia, who's fallen in love with some dude or other.

They ramble around the Island, especially Scotland, which the Scottish Smollett would like to tell you all about, and then guess what happens in the end? (view spoiler)

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### **TheSkepticalReader says**

bored. let's move on.

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### **Sherwood Smith says**

Reading the 18th Century novel is very much like riding a rambunctious horse. Actually, bowling along in a carriage; 100 years later, Eliot and the great Victorian novelists who were living with the noisy, fast, smoke-gouting trains would write with nostalgia of the grace and quietude and elegance of carriage travel. But the 17th Century novel depicts it as it more likely was, with heat, travel-sickness from the jolts, and frequent breakdowns and overturns in the terrible roads, with highwaymen everywhere as there was no real law and order on the highway.

Matthew Bramble, his spinster sister, his well-bred niece and nephew, and their servants, set out from Wales to travel all over England and Scotland. Along the way they encounter many odd characters, and as they write home to friends about their adventures, the reader gets an agreeable picture of the action from several points-of-view. Funniest are the spinster sister's letters, with their Freudian misspellings, and the even more unintentionally bawdy and scatological gaspers of Ms. Jenkins, her maid.

Duels that go awry, savage essays on hypocrisy in high society and about how fast cities change and become unrecognizable (and about the taste for speed with which city drivers careen their vehicles through London streets), about filthy germ-spreading habits in supposedly healthful spas (do NOT read the section on Bath right before a meal!), will whipsaw the reader between remote concerns and contemporary reactions. Smollett also writes himself into the story, as do 18th Century authors, and he doesn't forget to villify current writers, politicians, and other leaders against whom he has a grudge—and likewise to drape in flattering terms and oblique names his friends.

The group finds one Humphrey Clinker, an earnest young man with a religious bent. When he first drives for the family, his butt is hanging out of his rags, and the maid comments that she rather likes the sight. At the end, he turns out to be Bramble's long lost natural son, there are three weddings, and everyone is happy—with some very odd marriage customs described.

It's a deliciously fun novel, a vivid picture of England and Scotland at the time, and an excellent insight into how the times were changing toward modernity even then. Smollett's interests range between a vast and fascinating number of subjects: marriage customs, courting, medical technology (or lack of same); politics; the roads; the history of language (a good bit is when two characters are discussing how the words in Shakespear's plays have changed meaning); food; the strange justice system; education; and, of course, the dangers of travel.

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### **Shelley says**

Michael and I discovered this one while mocking many of the choices in "1001 Books to Read Before You Die." It has a ridiculous title, so naturally he went upstairs to grab a copy. Instead of continuing the mocking, however, I skimmed and was intrigued, so I checked it out. While I don't think it's necessary to read this before you die, it was pretty funny and well worth my time.

Welsh family goes on holiday all around England and Scotland, writing letters the entire time. Whiny, bitchy, frustrated and love-struck letters abound from the many different characters and yes, it's an epistolary novel. I think Lydia was my favorite.

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### **Scott says**

Dudes, I couldn't finish this book. It's interesting. So I was into it 3/4 of the way through. It was amusing and unique, though it had it's dry parts. I was liking it. And then one day I looked at it sitting there on my counter, battered in that way Penguin books tend to get, and I thought: "OH MY GOD IF I READ ANOTHER PAGE OF THAT BOOK I WILL KILL MYSELF I AM NOT EVEN KIDDING!"

I don't know what went wrong! Smollett's little cast of characters alternates narration, and they are varied

with their own distinctive voices. They travel around England and Scotland visiting spas as part of Matt Bramble's convalescence. He is a grumpy realist who describes the setting and culture of all these different towns, which can get a little dull since I don't know these places and never will because it was 250 years ago. The other travelers are Matt's sister, a desperate spinster, his pretty but frivolous niece, the nieces scholarly brother, a handmaiden, and Humphry Clinker, Bramble's steward, and for the life of me I don't know why he is also the title.

Anyway, all the characters have their own takes on the locations and situations that arise, and it's all very well-written and entertaining, especially if you have a little experience with 18th-century British literature, so... I dunno, I just couldn't do it, ok?!? Ugh, I'm a failure.

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### **Derek Davis says**

What a wonderful human spirit Smollett has. He exploits yet dearly loves the foibles of mankind and know how to make them both uproarious and genuinely reverential. The whole work is, in the end, a paean to friendship.

An 18th century epistolary novel, it presents a running series of letters, without further explication, that follows the travels of squire Matthew Bramble through much of England, into Scotland, and back toward his home in Wales. The letters are written by Bramble, his nephew Edward, his niece Liddy, his sister Tabitha and her "woman," Jenkins. They range from explosive expostulation to some of the funniest episodes ever put on paper.

Each character has a clearly identified style and vocabulary that never fails. But behind it all is the high good humor of the author, who shows himself at once a keen observer and a delighter in human nature.

The plot need worry no one. It's of no consequence. This is a work about people.

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### **Neale says**

"..he had reason to believe the stercoraceous flavour, condemned by prejudice as a stink, was, in fact, most agreeable to the organs of smelling; for, that every person who pretended to nauseate the smell of another's excretions, snuffed up his own with particular complacency; for the truth of which he appealed to all the ladies and gentlemen then present..."

What more need I say?

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### **Andrew says**

I was not expecting to like this work, or any 18th Century Epistolary novel featuring a character with a funny name. I just imagined some goofy British person stealing chickens and being a wag and angering the constable and complaining about Bolingbroke and eating bangers and mash. And yet I ended up loving it. Its an interesting melange of "authors" getting together to describe an expedition that starts at the apparent healing waters of Bath, moves to Scotland, and ends in London. The more proper title should be "The Life

and *Thoughts and Expeditions of Matthew Bramble*," because the grumpy hypochondriac patriarch steals the show with his observations and prescribed opinions about the way the world should work, why it doesn't, why it won't, and those damn young people.

Humphry Clinker doesn't show up until about 70 pages, and he's a noble savage type who keeps reappearing and eventually joins Bramble's caravan. Bramble's alter-ego is his nephew, Jeremy Melford, an educated type who constantly reminds you of the objective reserve he thinks he has. Jerry, however, is incapable of experiencing anything worthwhile, and his off-handed remarks only barely hide his lurking nature. It's great stuff seeing it from the two perspectives, and the epistolary form offers dual insights on situations that work brilliantly as a narrative.

Worth reading for any fan of the novel.

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### **BAM The Bibliomaniac says**

Audio #128

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### **Rod says**

18th-century epistolary novel by Salman Rushdie's favorite *Quixote* translator. It's witty, complex, and undoubtedly quite innovative for its time, and it serves as not only a very informative travelogue of Britain in the mid-late 1700s, but also as a portrait of the political and cultural landscape during this time frame. But gosh darn it, it just wasn't as *funny* as I was expecting it to be based on laudations calling it "one of the funniest novels of all time." It's certainly witty and chuckleworthy, but it just didn't tickle my funny-bone the way I was hoping it would. That said, it's a commendable work and, I'm assuming, an important one given its placement on university syllabi, and also the fact that I had never heard of it before buying it for a dollar at a library sale (although I was familiar with Smollett). You done good, Toby. Your weary soul can rest easy now.

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### **A.L. Stumo says**

How one book can break so many of the accepted conventions of writing and still be a good read is testimony to Mr. Smollett's genius. This book is epistolary and breaks the show don't tell rule in every scene, is told from several viewpoints (some scenes you piece together from retellings by the various narrators like Rashomon), has long rambling passages of philosophy (yet uses that for character development in a unique manner) and has no plot arc (instead having a plot maze).

Yet at the end of the plot maze, I was astounded at how each character was satisfied in their quest and all the ends bound together as well as any Dickens novel.

I found myself really liking many of these characters as I got to know them better and was truly glad for them as they found health and happiness.

I was also blow away by how beautifully constructed this non-linear view of the "vanity fair" to use Mr.

Thackeray's phrase. And by how Humphry the happy element (happy in the old sense of lucky or chance) contributes to make this book come together and to banish boredom, as he and the other characters are displayed to their advantage and disadvantage.

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### **Nicola says**

3 1/2 stars

This is an epistolary novel comprised of the letters of five very different communicators. I found it more interesting than entertaining. Although a work of fiction it was still a fairly detailed travelogue, crammed full of the personalities and popular places of the time. The grumpy misanthropic uncle (Mathew Bramble) saw everything through a lens of distaste which no doubt highlighted everything more than a less critical observer would have done. Not much escaped his scathing pen and very little was deemed worthwhile - people were generally hypocritical cheats and cities were positive sinks of inequity because of the corresponding increase in corrupt human souls pressing in on you from every side. Add to that poor food and disturbed sleep and you can see why Mr Bramble spent the whole trip complaining and wanting to be back in his peaceful country estate.

His nephew was a hot tempered younger version of the uncle himself only not so interesting. The niece, boringly virtuous and meekly pathetic, was even less interesting than her brother. The avaricious sister (and aunt) was mildly amusing in her desperate attempts to find a husband, any husband! So long as he wore trousers that was good enough! The best letters of the lot came from the aunts maidservant. Her poor spelling and gossip were more to my tastes anyway.

Humphrey Clinker himself came in partway through the book; a poor misbegotten wretch that the irascible but kind hearted Mr Bramble took on as a servant.

There really isn't any plot in this book and I'm sure that Smollett himself didn't intend anyone to take the ridiculous coincidences which abound inside the covers seriously. It's a light hearted read and I wouldn't go looking for anything more meaningful than that.

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