



## Exploring Scenes of “the English Urban Renaissance” in Tobias Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Tobias Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) charts the expedition of Mr. Mathew Bramble and his entourage through English cities and towns. Literary critics have remarked upon the negative portrayal of the English cities and towns in this novel by looking at Mr. Bramble’s dyspeptic view and the bucolic representation of Mr. Dennison’s life at the end of the work. By contextualizing this novel in the socio-cultural history of eighteenth-century England, especially the latter part of the century, this paper aims to illustrate the scenes of “the English Urban Renaissance.” Liddy’s perspective on the city of the late century and certain scenes which represent what this paper calls the triumph of the English Urban Renaissance are the focus of this paper. It also aims to show that the beautiful bucolic world portrayed at the end of the novel is made possible through help from the city.

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## 1. Introduction

The representation of the city in eighteenth-century novels is both negative and positive. Critics have usually attributed the negative portrayal of the city to novels written by male authors. The works of Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding, for example, depict the lives of rogues, criminals, and prostitutes. Roy Porter suggests that “Henry Fielding exposed [London]’s vanity, deceits and cheats ... [In] Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, London’s sordidness forbids any would-be idealization of the city as the cradle of refinement” (2000, p. 197). The rogue hero in Tobias Smollett’s first novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), also falls into this category. Sentimental novelists such as Samuel Richardson and Henry Mackenzie also focus on the cruel aspects of the city. However, unlike Defoe’s and Fielding’s characters, theirs are neither rogues nor prostitutes who are forced to experience the dark reality of London. They are people of great sensibility who have found themselves in corrupt London society. This allows the novelists to exploit urban scenes of distress over which their characters can weep for themselves or for others. Mackenzie’s hero in *The Man of Feeling* weeps over the inmates of the Bedlam asylum while Richardson’s *Clarissa* is left to social and sexual ruin in London.

In late eighteenth-century novels written by female authors we find a different representation of the city. Female writers such as Frances Burney and Jane Austen, in their so-called “polite literature”, favour the polite consumer aspects of the city. Since they generally write about courtship and marriage, they exploit urban scenes of entertainment and turn them into crucial settings for social liaisons. Their characters are usually drawn from members of the gentry who can afford to participate in a wide range of urban entertainments unlike Roderick Random and the poor rogue heroes of Defoe and Fielding. Reflecting on the city in eighteenth-century literature, all this led Raymond Williams to observe that “[o]n the one hand, in polite literature, there was a new urbanity. On the other hand, in Hogarth and Fielding, Gay and Defoe, there was a darker reality” (1975, p. 144).

Williams’s “a new urbanity” is worth taking note of. That is, the representation of the city as a place of vice and moral corruption has been persistent in literature

since classical times. Arguably, in the eighteenth century, a new urbanity or positive aspect of the city emerged, especially in polite novels written by the female authors as mentioned above. This emergence also owed a great deal to a series of English urban improvements throughout the century. As the eighteenth century progressed, for instance, London was improved by a series of paving and lighting acts and was emblazoned with new squares, streets, bridges, and pleasure gardens. It developed from the hellish London of Defoe in the early part of the eighteenth century to the consumerist and polite London of Burney and Austen in the latter part of the century. Other provincial towns and larger centres, as Peter Borsay (1989) has assiduously argued, experienced an “urban renaissance” as their economy revived and social and cultural services thrived, becoming rivals to London as the century progressed.<sup>2</sup> As a result, a positive portrayal of the city emerged. In addition to the improved condition of London and other cities, the number of female authors increased in the latter part of the century. As previously mentioned, most of these authors wrote about courtship and marriage, so they were able to exploit the improved conditions of cities.

Tobias Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* was published in 1771. It was his last novel and was written in epistolary form. Lewis M. Knapp, in his introduction to the Oxford edition of *Humphry Clinker*,<sup>3</sup> regards it as the author’s best novel and one of “the finest pieces of eighteenth-century fiction” and “the most successful epistolary novel in English” (2009, p. vii). The novel charts the expedition of the hypochondriacal Mr. Mathew Bramble and his entourage through English and Scottish cities and towns and, by so doing, characters are given the opportunity for observations on English and Scottish cities, life, and manners. Mr. Bramble’s party includes his sister, Tabitha, an old spinster on a quest to find a husband, his Oxford don nephew, Jeremy Melford or Jery, his love-sick niece, Lydia or Liddy and his maid, Mrs. Jenkins. They are joined *en-route* by Captain Obadiah Lismahago and Humphry Clinker who is hired to work as a footman and is later discovered to be Mr. Bramble’s illegitimate son. At the end of

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Borsay coined the term “the urban renaissance” in his influential book, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town 1660–1770* (Clarendon, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Tobias Smollett. *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, ed. Lewis M. Knapp (Oxford University Press, 2009). All references in this paper are from this edition and will be cited by page number.

the novel, after travelling around the country, the party arrives at the Dennisons' country estate, which is portrayed as a locus of rural felicity. Tabitha marries Captain Obadiah and Liddy marries George, the Dennisons' son.

The novel can be viewed, on the one hand, as a novel belonging to the male tradition of city representation if one considers the fact that it was written by a male author and the unpleasant side of cities comes from Mr. Bramble's perspective. On the other hand, it can be viewed as a novel belonging to the female tradition when one takes into account Liddy's impression of the city and the novel's year of publication. This novel is thus as much about the "monstrous city" as about the "English Urban Renaissance." The current paper aims to read this novel against the socio-historical context of eighteenth-century England. It will demonstrate that Mr. Bramble's journey reveals not only chaotic urban scenes that critics have long remarked upon, but also scenes of the "English Urban Renaissance" or "a new urbanity" mainly by looking at Liddy's, and occasionally Jerry's, attitude towards the English cities of the latter part of the century, and by considering certain scenes which illustrate what I identify as "the triumph of the English urban renaissance".

Literary critics, when studying Mr. Bramble—whose voice dominates the novel and whose opinion appears to reflect Smollett's—have pointed out the negative portrayal of the cities in this novel. Mr. Bramble hates cities and, thus, from his perspective, they appear grotesque and abominable. His perspective is a distinctly dyspeptic one, thanks largely to his hypochondria and misanthropy. His first view of Bath, for instance, is formed from the "exaggerated impression on the irritable nerves of an invalid, surprised by premature old age, and shattered with long-suffering" (p. 34). Krishnan (1988) suggests that his criticism "stems as much from his measure of human nature as from the excesses of his misanthropic and distempered mind ... his distemper and heightened sensitivity exaggerate his experience out of proportion" (p. 243). Likewise, Jeremy Lewis (2009) argues that due to Mr. Bramble's hypochondria, in combination with hypersensitivity, "excesses and vulgarity [in society] pain him in exactly the same way as the noise and dirt and bustle of London grate on his every nerve" (p. 274–5). Mr. Bramble is similar to his author in this respect as their peevishness is caused by their ill health. Their perspectives are distorted, leading them to find fault with almost everything. Indeed,

Lawrence Stern in *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768), published two years after Smollett's *Travels Through France and Italy* (1766), calls Smollett "Smelfungus", an individual whose hypochondria plagues his perspective and attitude.<sup>4</sup>

Not only does Mr. Bramble's distempered and distorted perspective of towns/cities result in a negative image of the urban world but also the novel's bucolic representation of the country creates a contrast between the monstrous city and the utopian countryside. The Dennisons embody rural simplicity, peace, and felicity. At the end of his expedition, Mr. Bramble finds himself and his entourage arriving in the rural world of his old friend, Mr. Dennison, and his family. Jeffery L. Duncan (1968) considers Smollett to be a traditionalist (like Henry Fielding and Oliver Goldsmith) who utilizes literary conventions, such as the pastoral and the georgic, to recognize and elevate rural values over urban ones. Krishnan (1988) views Mr. Bramble's expedition as the search for social and moral order, qualities embodied in the Dennisons, who reside in the country. Byron Gassman (1974) shows that Horace's work, which contrasts the peaceful and contented life on his Sabine farm with bustling Rome, quoted by Mr. Bramble while in the city, indicates the novel's contrast between the ostentation of busy London and Bath and the solitude of the countryside and the tranquility of rural retirement, with the latter being favoured over the former. Vassiliki Markidou (2010) argues that the traditional binary opposition between the countryside, which is represented as simple and pure, and the city as corrupt and sick, is both upheld and questioned by Smollett in this novel. Reading the novel through the lens of gender and space politics, she illustrates the ways in which the urban space is represented as a monstrous female threatening male identity, and the way in which a female character, Mrs. Baynard, represented a debilitating female urban force ruining the country estate.

Another female character, Liddy, a woman of constancy and integrity, is, however, shown to subvert "the stock patriarchal stereotypes according to which womanhood is irrevocably linked to passion, corruption and luxury, and manhood to reason, virtue

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<sup>4</sup> Sterne writes, "The learned Smelfungus travelled from Boulogne to Paris—from Paris to Rome—and so on—but he set out with the spleen and jaundice, and every object he pass'd by was discoloured or distorted." *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (Penguin Books, 2005), p. 28

and frugality” (Markidou, 2010, p. 67). This is owing to the role she plays in constructing rural simplicity at the end of the novel and the positive attitudes she holds towards the city. However, Liddy has largely escaped the critics’ attention. She is a teenage girl whose attitude towards the city, to many readers, is naïve. Indeed, Markidou is one of the few critics who attaches more importance to Lydia and shows that Liddy complicates the urban representation. This paper will focus on Liddy’s opinion and attitude towards the city which is crucial to the discussion of the English Urban Renaissance.

## **2. The English Urban Renaissance**

Because of its uncontrollable growth, size, crowds, and crime, the English city, especially London, came to occupy people’s perception as a monster. As early as the seventeenth century, the historian in Charles I’s reign, Peter Heylin, warned that “the monstrous growth [of London] impoverisheth all the rest of [the nation] by drawing to it all the animal and vital spirits” (cited in Borsay, 1989, p. 82). This image of London as a monster that drained both people and produce from the countryside to support its growth is echoed by Mr. Bramble, “[t]he Capital is become an overgrown monster which like a dropsical head, will in time leave the body and extremities without nourishment and support” (p. 87). With an ever increasing number of people moving to London, Defoe, in the early eighteenth century, described the monstrous growth of London as “a most straggling, confus’d manner, out of all shape, uncompact, and unequal” and inquired “[w]hither will this monstrous city then extend?” (1724—27/1962, p. 315). “Real monsters” also appeared in the River Thames. The river became so polluted that a satirical cartoon dubbed “Monster soup commonly called Thames water” (ca. 1828) showed a woman horrified at a magnified drop of Thames water which contained “All Monstrous, All Prodigious Thigs [sic]” as inscribed above the cartoon. This uncontrollable growth of the city or the urban monstrosity horrifies Mr. Bramble.

Outdoor pleasure gardens where Burney’s and Austen’s characters stroll with delight are too overcrowded for Mr. Bramble to enjoy and he on one occasion inquires, “What are the amusements at Ranelagh?” (p. 88). The huge mass is anonymous and undistinguishable. “The gayest places of public entertainment”, Mr. Bramble finds, “are filled with fashionable figures; which, upon inquiry, will be found to be journeymen

taylors, serving-men, and abigails, disguised like their betters” (p. 89). This group of people, together with the emerging middling rank, “has no idea of elegance and propriety” (p. 88). The enormity, anonymity, indistinguishability and impropriety of the crowd creates for Mr. Bramble the image of an “incongruous monster, called the public” (p. 88). In addition, “[a]ll the people [Mr Bramble] see[s], are too much engrossed by schemes of interest or ambition, to have any room left for sentiment or friendship” (p. 123). He ends his letter, “monstrous capital, without head or tail, members or proportions” (p. 90).

His perception of the capital as a monster also stretches to air, water, and food. Because of London’s notoriously polluted air, Mr Bramble is forced to “breathe the steams of endless putrefaction” (p. 119). London water is also “exposed to all manner of defilement ... The river [*sic*] Thames [*is*] impregnated with all the filth of London” (p. 120). His description here anticipates the famous satirical cartoon “Monster soup” as illustrated above. Food and drink “extolled by the Londoners” (p. 120) appear intoxicating and adulterated. Red wine is adulterated, bread is whitened, and veal is bleached to make them destructive to people’s health and appeal to Londoners who “sacrifice their taste and their health” and “the miller, or the baker, is obliged to poison them and their families” (p. 120). Mr. Bramble sees all these foods and drinks as the “monstrous depravity” (p.120).

Due to the urban development of trade, commerce, and industry the English city/town grew at an unprecedented rate. For many, London, after the Great Fire of 1666, rose like a Phoenix, not a monster, and became a global centre of trade and commerce and fashion. Other (provincial) cities/towns grew tremendously to accommodate expanding business and pleasure. Northern industrial cities rose and so did the port towns to facilitate the growth of intercontinental trade. With increasing economic prosperity and, consequently, people’s spending power, luxury trades and services developed a great deal. There emerged spa/seaside resort towns, such as Bath, (the emergence of these leisure towns was clearly an eighteenth century phenomenon) to provide pleasure and service not only to the upper class but also to the growing middling rank with its surplus wealth resulting from vibrant national economic activity. All this led Borsay to dub this period the “English Urban Renaissance.” Later historians, such as

Rosemary Sweet (1999), acknowledged the term as sufficiently capturing the overall picture of the growth of English cities (p. 230).

Urban cultural life thrived. The age-old image of the city as a place of vice and moral corruption persisted but this image started to be contradicted by the newly emerging image of the city as a place of progress, power, refinement, and intellect. The urban scene was central to the English Enlightenment. Clubs, societies and coffee houses became intellectual venues. The expansion of the circulating library throughout the country widened people's knowledge. Public entertainment was seen not only to erode morality and encourage sexual liaisons, but also to refine and educate people in propriety and decorum. As Borsay argued the "underlying mission was to rescue the nation from barbarity and ignorance; in a word, to civilize it" (1989, p. 257), and he commented elsewhere that "[t]owns became—and became seen to be—attractive and fashionable places, and the idea and ideal of the town came to occupy a new prominence in people's minds" (2002, p. 202). In addition, public buildings that housed these urban activities acquired a classical style; Palladianism and the city assumed a new character with broader streets and squares and townscapes all changed. All these developments enrapture Liddy who attaches wondrous qualities to various places and buildings by referring to them as "sumptuous palaces" and "enchanted castles" (p. 39). It is through Liddy's eyes that the scenes of the English Urban Renaissance emerge.

### **3. London**

Liddy, on one occasion, relates to her friend, Letty, how her uncle, Mr. Bramble, abhors the metropolis while she is enthralled by it. She writes, "People of experience and infirmity, my dear Letty, see with very different eyes from those that such as you and I make use of" (p. 93). Liddy has a claim to her observation since Mr. Bramble's weak constitution exaggerates his already soured perception of London. Liddy is a teenage girl who is charmed by the vibrancy of the city. Everything appears novel and exciting to her. Mr. Bramble's monstrous city turns out to be "an earthly paradise" (p. 39) for Liddy.

In London, Liddy sees prosperous growth in every way. Far from being an unhealthy growth, London, for her, "spread[s] out into an incredible extent" (p. 91). The

rise of buildings and churches signifies London's cultural and financial prosperity. St Paul's, according to her judgement, is "an earthly temple more grand and magnificent" (p. 91). The bridges are "so vast, so stately, so elegant" (p. 91). The crowds or "human tide continues to flow, without interruption or abatement, from morn till night," and, while definitely looking horrifying to Mr. Bramble, appear "striking" (p. 91) to her eyes. The River Thames, that accumulation of London's filth and a visible source of waste for Mr. Bramble, is a sign of London's successful trade and commerce which is to be admired and an imperial centre to be proud of as it "is covered with small vessels, barges, boats and wherries" as the "wealth and grandeur [of] Bagdad, Diarbekir, Damascus, Ispahan and Samarkand, [are] here realized" (p. 92).

Roy Porter in *London: A Social History* (2000) cites Mr. Bramble when discussing the negative aspect of London. Illustrating the cultural scene of urban renaissance found in pleasure gardens he quotes Liddy, and when talking about Ranelagh, Porter borrows Liddy's description of it to visualize the garden for his readers:

Ranelagh looks like the enchanted palace of a genie, adorned with the most exquisite performances of painting, carving, and gilding, enlightened with a thousand golden lamps, that emulate the noon-day sun; crowded with the great, the rich, the gay, the happy, and the fair; glittering with cloth of gold and silver, lace, embroidery, and precious stones. (p. 92)

Indeed, Ranelagh and Vauxhall were proof of the polite and consumerist London of the latter part of the century. Both reached their height of popularity from the mid to late eighteenth century. Opened to the public in 1742, Ranelagh was considered to be more fashionable than its bigger rival, Vauxhall. Leaving Ranelagh for Vauxhall by boat, Liddy comes upon an accident which, however, is "fully recompensed by the pleasures of Vauxhall" because the garden was "crowded with the gayest company" that was "enlivened with mirth, freedom, and good humour" (p. 93). Opened in the 1660s, Vauxhall Garden was later leased to an ambitious manager, Jonathan Tyers, in 1732 and after that was continuously improved to attract visitors. "Mirth" and "freedom" observed by Liddy deserve special attention because, through Liddy's eyes, a scene of

sociability emerges there. Vauxhall's appeal, as Penelope J. Corfield explains, laid in its relative openness: "[Vauxhall] was not a location reserved for any one social group, nor for any one age-group ... The element of social mixing was facilitated as relaxed crowds strolled in an ornamental open-air environment" (2012, p. 11). People enjoyed not only the garden but also the company promenading there. It was one of the places to see and to be seen, to socialize in and enjoy.

After her outdoor walk, Liddy attends Mrs. Cornelys' assembly. She is introduced to Lady Griskin who later introduces her and her aunt "to some of her particular friends of quality" (p. 94). Liddy's circle of acquaintances is being widened. Again, this is a scene of sociability. Her social manner will be polished and her conversation improved through her interaction with people, especially at the assembly where the rules of conduct and etiquette were considered to refine people's qualities. It should be noted that public walking and assemblies were especially responsible for promoting sociability since, as Borsay explains, they propelled people into contact with each other, unlike the theatre or the races where actors and horses diverted their attention (1989, p. 273). All in all, a variety of polite urban entertainment creates a nuisance for Mr. Bramble, but for Liddy it is cultural enjoyment.

#### **4. Bath and Other Spa Towns**

Second in the urban hierarchical system and the queen of spas was Bath, to which Mr. Bramble attaches the term "monster Bath." The first reception Mr. Bramble receives after having arrived in Bath is a series of appalling noises. Choosing to lodge on the south Parade, away from the noise of coaches and carriages, Mr. Bramble and his party are welcomed by the town-waits whom Jery describes as "those noisy intruders" (p. 29). Happening to lodge on the first floor, Mr. Bramble is disturbed by the noise of a dancing master practising his steps upstairs. After having just asked the dancing master to stop dancing, Mr. Bramble is startled by the noise of the Abbey bells rung to announce the arrival of an eminent visitor. They are rung so loudly "that [they] could not hear one another speak" (p. 31). His neighbour, a Creole gentleman, then salutes Mr. Bramble with a concert of French horns which produces "such discordant sounds, as might have discomposed the organs of an ass" (p. 31). Far from the scene of

repose which Mr. Bramble has expected, his first impression is filled with a cacophony of discordant sounds.

Liddy does not hear these horrid sounds but sounds from, in her own words, “a new world” (p. 39). Her ears are “continually entertained ... with the sound of coaches, chaises, chairs, and other carriages” (p. 39). She hears “The merry bell rings round” (p. 39). She is delighted to relate to her friend that she has been welcomed by the city-waits. Tracing their origins back to the late middle ages, town-waits served as both watchmen and music players for civic ceremonies. Although their popularity waned over time and they had been challenged by the growth of various kinds of musical performance, they survived. According to Borsay (1989), they were not only a reliable source of performers or, as in York, the backbone of the city’s musical life but they were an important part of urban ritual. The purpose of welcoming and saluting people of quality with a peal of Abbey bells and town-waits was to lower social barriers and encourage sociability. From the sound of the bells, people knew who had just arrived or at least had the satisfaction of enquiring who had arrived. A Bath architect, John Wood the elder, remarked that people “have the Pleasure of knowing, directly, the Name of every Family that comes to Town; for upon the first Sound of the Bells, every Body sends out to enquire for whom they ring” (1765, p. 417). Borsay (1989) also argues that both the bells and town-waits were a ritual or a rite of passage, reminding visitors that they had entered into a special sphere with its own codes and customs which obliged them to live publicly rather than privately. This ritual may have begun well before the eighteenth century but it was during the era of Beau Nash (1704–1764) that the ritual was formalized. Indeed, it is Bath in the latter part of the century that Liddy calls “a new world.”

After a series of complaints, Mr. Bramble concludes that Bath’s buildings and landscape “look like the wreck of streets and squares disjointed by an earthquake ... What sort of a monster Bath will become in a few years” (p. 36). However, Liddy views the buildings differently. For her, “The Square, the Circus, and the Parades, put you in mind of the sumptuous palaces represented in prints and pictures; and the new buildings, such as Princes-row, Harlequin’s-row, Bladud’s-row, and twenty other rows, look like so many enchanted castles, raised on hanging terraces” (p. 39). There is no architectural

description from Liddy, yet in many contemporary eyes, the Circus, for instance, was one of the grand architectural features of the period. Designed by John Wood the elder in a classical style or Palladianism, the Circus stunned its residents and passers-by with its pilasters and columns laid on top of each other across storeys, showcasing the grandiose nature of the façade. The Reverend John Penrose in his letter dated 28 April 1766, described the Circus during his visit to Bath: “The Circus is reckoned one of the most elegant Piles of Building in Europe” (1983, p. 67). This is not a landscape of monstrous buildings but of classical designs which symbolize the prosperity of the individual and the nation and civilisation, literally and figuratively given the fact that the classical style, associated with proportion and order, was favoured over that of the “barbaric” gothic.

Civilisation is a keyword in the English urban renaissance. People were civilised in “civilised” buildings. “[T]he peculiar quality of Music,” according to the composer, Charles Avison, was “to raise the *sociable and happy passions*, and to *subdue the contrary ones*” (1775, p. 5) and classical architecture was considered to heighten that quality (Borsay, 1989). Robert Morris, in 1755, argued for “simple proportion” and “geometrical and harmonic magnitude” which are characteristic of the classical building and suggested that “there are certain proportions in buildings which affect the mind through the eye, as well as music does through the ear”.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the uniform character of the so-called townhouses, argues Borsay, facilitated relationships among neighbours. The style of a town house “discouraged excessive ornamentation, idiosyncrasy, and individualism” and the multi-dwelling buildings, which Mr. Bramble finds annoying because the second floor lodges the dancing master who rehearses above his head, enclose individual lodgings in a large physical unit, creating “a more ‘gregarious’ urban landscape” and, thus, foster sociability (Borsay, 1989, pp. 270–71). The city/town encouraged interaction and association, not to mention a wide variety of cultural activities which gentrified people, forcing them into civilisation. One eighteenth-century man, William Hutton, who first visited Birmingham in 1741, was considered to have been “cast[ed] into those regions of civility” (1783/2009).

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<sup>5</sup> Morris mentions it in his introduction to *Select architecture* (1755) but this introductory part contains no page number. The full name of this work appears in the reference section.

The city/town brought people into close contact through business, cultural pursuits, and entertainment. This disturbs Mr. Bramble, delights Liddy, and suggests a sign of civilisation to Jerry. The lack of propriety, the taste of the nouveau riche, or those who have acquired their wealth through trade and the professions disgust Mr. Bramble and the fact that these people mingle with their social superiors horrifies him. While Liddy sees “the highest quality, and the lowest trades folks, jostling each other, without ceremony” (p. 39), Jerry opines that “those plebeians who discovered such eagerness to imitate the dress and equipage of their superiors, would likewise, in time, adopt their maxims and their manners, be polished by their conversation, and refined by their example” (p. 51). Indeed, Bath’s and other spas’ organized routines of activities were created to ensure that people from different social backgrounds did mix. People were forced by various social rounds to do the same activities, at the same time and in the same place. By participating in cultural pastimes such as balls, theatre, and music concerts with their rules of social conduct, people were educated into polite behaviour. Inferiors had the chance to imitate their superiors in order to improve themselves. Easier access to clubs, societies, coffee-houses and a liberal attitude towards class made these social rounds of activities attractive and attainable. Borsay (1989) argues that during the eighteenth century spas were known for their relaxed (albeit not neutral) attitudes to social distinction. A letter written in the 1730s in John Cole’s *Scarborough Guide* (1825) mentions that in Scarborough “gentlemen appear in all places naked (without their swords); not through an Apprehension of Danger from the intoxicating Nature of the Spaw water, but from a polite Declaration, that in Places of Public Resort, all Distinctions ought to be lost in general complaisance” (p. 17). A visitor to Tunbridge assembly rooms in the 1760s, Thomas Benge Burr, remarked in *London Magazine* that “all ranks are mingled together without any distinction. The nobility, and the merchants; the gentry, and the traders; are all upon an equal footing” (p. 374). Both Liddy’s and Jerry’s optimistic attitude towards the interaction of people in the city/town precisely underlines the mission of the English urban renaissance.

The episode involving Tom Eastgate’s and Prankley’s near duel deserves attention because it presents the triumph of the English urban renaissance or urban civilisation over an ancient custom such as the duel. Many years before, Prankley had

promised to give a church living to his college friend, Eastgate. When they meet in Bath, Prankley informs him that he intends to give it to someone else and then forgets about Eastgate. Prankley begins to insult Eastgate, who then challenges him to a pistol duel (since swords had become obsolete). The duel was a means of protecting one's honour and was a medieval way of dispensing justice, so the duel and the swords associated with it were symbols of the medieval and the uncivilised, and with the rise of the city, the cradle of civilisation and enlightenment, and the growth of cultural urban activities that promoted politeness and refinement, swords were not allowed in assembly rooms. Not only did swords accidentally tear ladies' gowns, about which many of them complained, but also leaving swords—an act equivalent to discarding an ancient code of honour—effectively indicated that one was entering a special domain governed by politeness, an urban and modern form of honour (Vickery, 2004). Although duels were illegal, they were practised throughout the eighteenth century. However, the duel between Prankley and Eastgate does not happen because it appears that a duel cannot be allowed to take place in civilised society. This is partly due to Smollett's personal disapproval of duels—an abhorrence of this practice he expressed in letter XV (Nice, January 3, 1764) in his *Travels through France and Italy*.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that their dispute is settled when they meet in “the coffee-house.” This is significant because in urban public settings, such as coffee-houses, debates and conversations were conducted and matters resolved without shedding blood. Their dispute does not end in a medieval way but in the polite urban world of the coffee-house.

Coffee-houses were one of the urban public venues crucial to a polite and civilised society; in coffee-houses, conversations were conducted not only about scandal but also about politics and philosophy. Book shops are described by Liddy as “charming places” (p. 40). The famous Spring Garden in Bath is “a sweet retreat” (p. 41) and Ranelagh in London is like “the enchanted palace” (p. 92). The public rooms are crowded

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<sup>6</sup> Smollett wrote, “let a court be instituted for taking cognizance of all breaches of honour, with power to punish ... all persons insulted, shall have recourse to this tribunal: let every man who seeks personal reparation with sword, pistol, or other instrument of death, be declared infamous ... ” *Travels through France and Italy* (Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2010, pp. 165–66).

with people, drinking, conversing and dancing. These places can be visited and cultural activities enjoyed without one being morally corrupted.

The last point about Bath the current paper wishes to make concerns its famous mineral waters. Mr. Bramble paints a frightful image of the mineral water quite contrary to Liddy's positive impression of it. He suspects the water to have been contaminated by "the sweat, and dirt, and dandriff; and the abominable discharges of various kinds, from twenty different diseased bodies" (p. 46). Next comes a haunting picture of the Roman baths which he finds to have covered an old burial ground. He concludes, "as we drink the decoction of living bodies at the Pump-room, we swallow the strainings of rotten bones and carcasses at the private bath" (p. 46). Mr. Bramble appears to exaggerate what he sees and tastes owing to his fine sensibility together with his abhorrence of Bath, communicating to readers the impression of dangerous and disgusting water that could kill drinkers instantly. However, according to contemporary judgement, Bath water was considered to be effective in curing diseases, and as historian, Maggie Lane, suggests "[t]here was scarcely a complaint that the Bath waters were not supposed to remedy" (2007, p. 12). Yet, it should be noted that there was a suspicion that the water's medical efficacy was illusory. Liddy nevertheless finds it "rather agreeable to the taste, grateful to the stomach", and able to revive her spirits. "You cannot imagine what wonderful cures it performs," (p. 40) she declares to her friend. Smollett is similar to Mr. Bramble in that both of them find the baths squalid and badly regulated and Smollett was also skeptical about the efficacious effects of Bath water. However, on many occasions, Smollett mentioned the beneficial effects of Bath water. Smollett wrote a letter on 2 October 1762 to his friend William Hunter, describing the efficacy of Bath water, "Since my arrival in Bath I have in spite of a fresh Cold, slept very well, without any Interruption from the Asthma. I drink moderately of the water... I should think myself already cured" (1926, p. 77). In November 1765, he wrote to John Moore to inform him that "the Bath water agrees with me wonderfully well; & upon the whole, I am so well at present that some of my friends declare that they never saw me look better" (1926, p. 97).

Other spa towns such as Hotwells and Harrogate receive similar attacks from Mr. Bramble and praise from Liddy. For Mr. Bramble, not only does the water at Hotwells

provide a paltry remedy but also “the dirt, the stench, the chilling blasts, and the perpetual rains...render this place .... intolerable” (p. 24). However, Liddy offers an alternative view of Hotwells as a place of sociability and pleasant water and a place “where the company is assembled before dinner; so good natured, so free, so easy; and there we drink the water so clear, so pure, so mild, so charmingly maukish” (p. 27). Contrary to Mr. Bramble’s description of its terrible atmosphere, Liddy’s elevates this place to the level of a near “perfect paradise” as she concludes in her letter to a friend. The other spa town they visit is Harrogate. Upon arrival, Mr. Bramble comments that it is “wild common, bare and bleak, without tree or shrub, or the least signs of cultivation” (p. 163). Once, he tastes the sulphur water while holding his nose, he feels “sickness, gripping, and insurmountable disgust” (p. 163) in his stomach. His nephew, however, disagrees with him. Jery prefers Harrogate to Bath, stating that “here we are more sociable and familiar” (p. 161) as lodgers eat together in a public room, drink tea in the afternoon and play cards or dance in the evening and there is a public ball every day. A scene of sociability emerges as there appears to be “a general disposition among us to maintain good-fellowship, and promote the purposes of humanity” (p. 161). Bath, Hotwells, Harrogate, and other spa towns played a crucial role in promoting sociability. For someone like Mr. Bramble, overwhelmed by the multitude, the urban scenes appear chaotic and disagreeable and tend to encourage misanthropy in individuals, but for many people the urban crowd provided opportunities to polish ones’ manner, refine ones’ conversation, and improve ones’ etiquette through all forms of socializing in various urban places; these were the signs of the urban renaissance and symbols of civilised society.

##### **5. Newcastle and Gloucester**

The entourage proceeds to Newcastle. Newcastle was a provincial capital occupying the third tier in Borsay’s category in which he suggests that cities like Norwich, Bristol, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Chester were able to offer rich seams of pleasure and business transaction (Borsay, 1989, p. 30). They were both business centres and fashionable centres, where assemblies were regularly held and plays and music were thriving alongside vibrant business activities. In Newcastle, Jery’s valet, Dutton, takes

Mrs. Tabitha's servant, Winifred, to a play. They dress fashionably (but ridiculously in Jerry's eyes) and behave like their betters. On their way back they are verbally molested by some people who have learned about their real social status.

Dutton's and Winifred's case reflects an aspect of social/cultural emulation in the English urban renaissance. Eighteenth-century England was notable for its expansion of the gentry as the middling rank/the professionals who found their stock of surplus wealth had increased; this enabled them to participate in socio-cultural pleasures which had hitherto been reserved for the gentry and the nobility. Not only were the professionals gentrified but all social classes aspired to social ascendancy. Fielding (1751) lamented upon the acquisition of status, "while the nobleman will emulate the grandeur of a prince, and the gentleman will aspire to the proper state of a nobleman, the tradesman steps from behind his counter into the vacant place of the gentleman" (p. 10). He saw the pursuit of status as indecorous and destructive to social stability. Mr. Bramble shares his concern when he observes that "men of low birth, and no breeding, have found themselves suddenly translated into a state of affluence ... they can mingle with the princes and nobles of the land" (p. 37). The fact that Dutton and Winifred dress and behave like their master and mistress, and that "they reached [the theatre] unmolested" (p. 209) yet are hissed and hooted at on their way back, indicates, to a certain extent, that the English urban renaissance was a middling rank/ gentry phenomenon, and provides more evidence that the growth of the middling rank and the expansion of the gentry contributed to the formation of polite and pleasurable society. The country squire was educated into propriety through his contact with the city, and so was the middling rank/the professional, whose manner was refined and polished to achieve improvement or to gratify his own vanity or both.

In eighteenth-century literature, the city, with its mass and anonymity, its disguises and identity concealment is portrayed negatively and is instrumental in a character's destruction. Gloucester, as depicted in *Humphry Clinker*, toys with the negative portrayal of the city only to show that Gloucester and the disguise associated with it is not destructive. Gloucester is the town of Liddy's boarding school. At first, Gloucester appears to be a city of intrigue, at least according to Jerry's eyes, as his sister Liddy, who is attending boarding school there, carries on a clandestine

correspondence with an actor named Wilson whom she has met at the theatre, probably the one at Barton Street, where the first permanent theatre in Gloucester was built in 1763. This naturally alarms Jery given the theatre's reputation for sexual intrigue and liaison. Conduct books abound with cautionary tales of a young lady deceived and abducted by a man whom she has met at a playhouse. In literature, the disguise or identity concealment that the city tends to buttress usually leads to destruction.<sup>7</sup> However, the city offers an opportunity the country cannot—the chance to assume a new identity. The real name of Wilson is George Dennison, the son of a country squire, who left his family to avoid an arranged marriage and became an actor. Indeed, the possibility of disguise depends on the urban mass, a place where nobody knows anybody's business. George Dennison's urban disguise helps him to escape from a loveless marriage and paves the way to meeting Liddy in Gloucester.

## 6. The Country and the City

The negative portrayal of the city/town in this novel is heightened when it is contrasted with the bucolic imagery of the countryside and the Utopia-like world of the Dennisons at the end of the novel. A closer examination reveals that their rural paradise is, in part, constructed with the help of the urban commercial world. In other words, the interconnectedness between the country and the city is crucial in constructing their rural paradise. Mr. Dennison is Mr. Bramble's old friend, and his family, in Mr. Bramble's words, represents the "pitch of rural felicity" (p. 320). In addition, "a life of extravagance, and dissipation, which [the Dennisons] equally detested, despised, and determined to avoid" (p. 322) recalls the urban life that Mr. Bramble's party has experienced throughout his journey to numerous cities/towns, heightening the negative portrayal of the city. The Dennisons' "rural felicity" does not begin well. Mr. Dennison is a second son who inherited the country estate after the death of his older brother. Mr. Dennison's friends are against his decision to manage the estate because not only has his brother's

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<sup>7</sup> Such examples can be found in, for instance, Eliza Heywood's *Fantomina* (1725) in which its heroine assumes four identities in order to have a sexual liaison with the man she loves, and she finally meets a tragic end. In Richardson's *Clarissa*, the heroine lives in a house that is purported to belong to gentlewomen but which is, in fact, a brothel.

mismanagement ruined it, but also Mr. Dennison lacks agricultural skills as he has been educated for law. Fortunately, he meets Mr. Wilson in the “market-town” (p. 324). This market-town, like other towns, brings people together for business transactions and day-to-day interactions. Mr. Wilson then introduces him to his father-in-law, Farmer Bland, who teaches him about farming and agriculture. Mr. Dennison next “return[s] to London, where [he] forthwith [sells] off [his] household-furniture” (p. 325) and, so, it is from London that the money to build his rural world comes. Another example of financial dependence upon the city to build and rebuild the rural world is Mr. Baynard’s case. He has been ruined by his extravagant late wife whose death allows him to rebuild his life. Mr. Bramble helps him by “class[ing] and set[ting] apart the articles designed for sale, under the direction of an upholder from London” (p. 343). In addition, Mr. Dennison’s construction of his rural utopia also involves a process of enclosure when he has “gradually inclosed [*sic*] all my farms, and made such improvements” (p. 328). Historians suggest that while enclosure increased the volume of yield and enhanced prospects, it was partially responsible for driving rural labourers to industrial cities in which they led a miserable life. The image of the city as “an overgrown monster”, which horrifies Mr. Bramble earlier in the novel, is, in part, conjured by the influx of rural people migrating to the city.

The country and the city are also connected in a subtle way. Mr. Bramble hates the city and condemns its luxury and extravagance in all of which he is, however, implicated (Markidou, 2010). Markidou, citing Aileen Douglas, shows that his purchase of medical texts and his materialistic generosity towards his niece are forms of luxurious consumption. Mr. Bramble gives his niece “a present of a very fine set of garnets” (p. 58) and “a present of a suit of clothes, with trimmings and laces, which cost more money than I shall mention” (p. 94), as Liddy records in her letters. This is clearly an example of conspicuous consumption generated by the English Urban Renaissance. Charles R. Sullivan, in a similar vein, argues that Liddy, by mentioning those fine gifts bestowed upon her by Mr. Bramble, “implicate[s] Bramble in the very frenzy of expenditure that he condemns” (2004, p. 440).

Finally, Liddy, whose attitude towards the city contributes to its vibrant image, expresses near the end of the novel a view which appears to sum up the vices and ills

associated with the city, but it is a view that is arguably superficial. Liddy complains to her friend:

I long for repose and solitude, where I can enjoy that disinterested friendship which is not to be found among crouds [*sic*], and indulge those pleasing reveries that shun the hurry and tumult of fashionable society—Unexperienced as I am in the commerce of life, I have seen enough to give me a disgust to the generality of those who carry it on—There is such malice, treachery, and dissimulation, even among professed friends and intimate companions, as cannot fail to strike a virtuous mind with horror. (p. 308)

Nowhere to be found in fashionable society are solitude and true friendship. Malice, treachery, dissimulation, and tumult horrify the virtuous mind, which remains so because it has never been in contact with the city. If the rural mind is virtuous, the urban one is corrupt. This binary opposition reaches back to classical times. However, it should be noted that Liddy expresses clichéd sentiment towards the city when her mind is deeply agitated after she has seen who could be her lover, Wilson, and has conjectured a possible duel between him and her brother: “At present, I have something at heart that employs my whole attention, and keeps my mind in the utmost terror and suspense [*sic*]” (p. 308). She thus signs her letter—“The dejected and forlorn Lydia Melford.” After her marriage to George Dennison at the end of the novel, the couple plan to celebrate their nuptial bliss in Bath and her wish to escape “the hurry and tumult of fashionable society” vanishes.

## 7. Conclusion

Liddy, as a wife, will revisit Bath. The city this time will not be “a new world” but a romantic one. The tunes from a town-wait will be sweet. The garden which she has described as “a sweet retreat” will become sweeter. However, their love alone is not able to make Bath romantic without lighting and paving and the help of Wood the Elder and the Younger and “Beau” Nash, who among other eminent figures, built and

civilised the city, making Bath pleasant, exciting, and romantic for the newly arrived and newly-married Liddy. This city and others needed to be built and civilised in order to accommodate the growing numbers of the middling rank and the gentry who yearned for luxury, cultural services and sociable activities, and to reflect the prosperity and civilisation of the nation itself. For Liddy, who holds a positive attitude toward the English city/town, those emerging urban services and activities represent scenes of “the English Urban Renaissance” and signs of civilisation; they are forms of diversion that not only delight but also educate those participating in them into refinement and propriety. In addition, the countryside, as portrayed in this novel, is not an isolated pastoral world. Trade, commerce, and business, which render the city chaotic and greedy, and the newly moneyed who annoy Mr. Bramble are instrumental in constructing the rural world. The country and city are not separated. Likewise, the good and the bad co-exist in the eighteenth-century city. This novel is one of the earliest eighteenth-century novels to emphasize the scenes of English Urban Renaissance. The city, for some, is a “monster” but, for many, it is “a perfect paradise.”

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