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Journal Item

How to cite:

Jones, Richard J. (2018). Tobias Smollett and the work of writing. *Literature Compass*, 15(8), article no. e12485.

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1111/lic3.12485>

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Tobias Smollett and the work of writing

ABSTRACT: This essay offers an overview of the state of Smollett Studies today. It is also an argument about what makes Tobias Smollett interesting. It therefore seeks to avoid the value judgments about "English literature" that have dogged Smollett's reputation (ever since "English literature" was invented) and restore him to the "work of writing" in which he was engaged. The essay thus provides an account of the wide-ranging nature of his work in order to balance a previous critical emphasis on his novels. It includes some views of his role as a translator, historian, critic, editor and, perhaps more provocatively, "hack". Recent studies in eighteenth-century print culture and the (Scottish) Enlightenment point the way to a new Smollett, at work within a messier history of writing.

KEYWORDS: Tobias Smollett; Scottish Enlightenment; print culture; periodical writing; translation; novel; history of writing

"He has published more volumes, upon more subjects, than perhaps any other author of modern date; and, in all, he has left marks of his genius." This is William Godwin's account of the writer Tobias Smollett (1721–71) at the end of the eighteenth century. He goes on to moderate his praise: "We applaud his works; but it is with a profounder sentiment that we meditate his capacity". Godwin thus manages to suggest that there is something lacking in Smollett's works – at least compared with the "capacity" that is also signaled by them. I start with this view of Smollett because it is an early example of how his works are frequently read with unease. Behind Godwin's applause is the suspicion that these are the works of a hack writer (though Godwin only calls Smollett a "hasty" one). Such a suspicion accounts for the way that Smollett's reputation has enjoyed, as O M Brack, Jr. puts it, periods of only "sporadic recovery" (2007: 14). In 1947 Fred Boege thus described and lamented Smollett's critical rise and fall; in 1964, Donald Bruce labeled his study as a "rehabilitation"; in 1982, Alan Bold noted that the time was "ripe for reassessment" (7). As recently as 2004, Kenneth Simpson was able to conclude (in his entry for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*) that Smollett's "achievements as an innovator have yet to be fully recognised". In order to sustain some of the applause due to Smollett, however, we might turn back to the kind of serious meditation that Godwin advised. To meditate Smollett's capacity is to allow a new work to appear amongst the multitude of his volumes: the work of writing itself.

This essay is partly an argument for why we should read Smollett today and partly a survey of the state of Smollett Studies. I have started by noting the scale of Smollett's achievements – he really did publish "more volumes, upon more subjects" than perhaps any other author in the eighteenth century – in order to de-emphasize the view that Smollett was principally a writer of fiction.

This view became part of the “sporadic recovery” of his reputation throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; nevertheless, because of an interest in a certain kind of fictional writing, it did not help it. As John Skinner has put it: “Smollett, more than any other eighteenth-century writer, has suffered from the assumptions of novel-centred criticism” (1996: 20). Even though Skinner tried to avoid the word “novel” (in a study of what are otherwise Smollett’s novels), the concept has a gravitational pull of its own. Jerry C. Beasley, who offers the definitive starting point for any study of Smollett, acknowledges how Smollett was “variously, a poet, a playwright, a prose satirist, a pamphleteering controversialist, a translator, an editor and compiler, a historian, a travel writer, a journalist”; nevertheless, he concludes that “Above all, he was a novelist” (1998: 1). This approach has led to a misunderstanding about the kind of work in which Smollett saw himself as engaged – in effect, like Godwin’s early remarks, it discloses some unease about the quality of it. Recent studies of eighteenth-century print culture and the Enlightenment, however, have given us a glimpse of a new Smollett, at work within a much messier history of writing. The recent re-publication of some of Smollett’s writings in Brack, Jr., Chilton and Keithley’s *The Miscellaneous Writings of Tobias Smollett* (2015), for example, opens up the idea of the “miscellany” – or perhaps the work of compilation – as a new way in which Smollett’s work might be understood.

Biography and scholarly editions

The best place to start to read about Smollett’s life remains Lewis M. Knapp’s literary biography, *Tobias Smollett: Doctor of Men and Manners* (1949). This is justly celebrated as the first modern biography of Smollett and one in which Knapp’s painstaking assemblage of evidence allows the reader to come to his or her own view (Rousseau and Boucé, 1971: 5). It might be complemented by Knapp’s collection of the fairly small number of letters that have survived from Smollett in *The Letters of Tobias Smollett* (1970). Knapp’s work forms the basis for Jeremy Lewis’s biography (2003), which, though undertaking no original research, gives a rich sense of the world in which Smollett lived. The image of Smollett that emerges here has been revised in recent years by work undertaken for the edition of his writings published by the University of Georgia Press. Some of this work can be found distilled in the excellent introduction by one of the General Editors of the series, Jerry C. Beasley, to his study *Tobias Smollett: Novelist* (1998). The critical introductions to each of the eleven volumes of *The Works of Tobias Smollett* (1988–2014) are in themselves an invaluable resource for understanding Smollett’s life. Turning to a collection of Smollett’s works for biographical details continues the tradition begun by Robert Anderson and John Moore in their respective *Works of Smollett* in 1796 and 1797. These early biographical accounts (along with Godwin’s remarks, cited at the start of this essay) are usefully reprinted in Lionel Kelly’s *Tobias Smollett: The Critical Heritage* (1987).

Although there are occasional warnings against reading Smollett’s writing as autobiography – notably by Boucé who coined the term “inverted biography” to describe how Smollett’s life “has often been abusively reconstructed from the events or characters described in his novels” (Boucé, 1971: 201) – the autobiographical aspects of Smollett’s work are, ultimately, indisputable. The introduction to the Georgia edition of Smollett’s first novel, *The Adventures of*

Roderick Random (1748/2012), rightly assimilates the novel's account of Roderick's naval experiences into Smollett's own biographical background. Similarly, the recent Georgia edition of *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751/2014), begins by declaring it to be "a deeply personal work" (xxvii). Indeed, the choice of copy text for this edition, the first edition of 1751, reveals the Smollett who is of interest to readers today: that is, the one who wrote "in the sometimes fierce heat of resentment against personal enemies real and imagined" and before he had, apparently, got himself under control (xvi). The time has perhaps come when we can begin to acknowledge how Smollett's writing is a form of (fictional) autobiography. This might mean moving away from the idea that Smollett, in *Travels through France and Italy* (1766), is "a fictional character created by Smollett" (Brack, Jr., 2007: 15) – an interpretation inspired by that gravitational pull of the novel – towards the notion that he was, at the same time, a "factual" one. The generically unstable *Travels through France and Italy* is not included in the Georgia edition of Smollett's works; however, Frank Felsenstein has updated his excellent Oxford edition (1979) with Broadview Press (2011). Gaps in Smollett's canon, as represented by the Georgia edition, as well as gaps in Knapp's biography, have been filled with the recent volume *The Miscellaneous Writings of Tobias Smollett* (2015). Notably, the miscellany is framed as giving insight into "a man reaching into himself, overconfidently at times, but demonstrating immense ability" (xvi).

The task of translation

One effect of the publication of Smollett's writing by the University of Georgia Press has been to draw attention to his extensive work as a translator. Four volumes offer authoritative editions of translated works. Of his first translation, *The Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane* (1748/2011) by Alain René Le Sage, Smollett wrote: "I did not choose to put my name to it" (Knapp, 1970: 10). Nevertheless, he changed his mind for the publication of the second edition in 1750. By this time, Smollett had completed another translation of a work by Le Sage, *The Devil upon Crutches* (1750/2005) and had begun work on what was to become, arguably, his masterpiece of translation, *The History and Adventures of the Renowned Don Quixote* by Cervantes – this was finally published, with Smollett's name firmly on the title page, in 1755 (and by Georgia University Press in 2003). The fact that Smollett's translation of *The Adventures of Telemachus, the son of Ulysees*, by François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon (1776/1997) was first published five years after Smollett's death, perhaps gives the impression that he gradually moved away from such work. This is not the case. The little studied *The Works of M. de Voltaire, Translated from the French* (1761–65), which Smollett edited with Thomas Franklin, included, along with "Notes, Historical and Critical", Smollett's translation of *Micromegas* (first published in 1753 and now reprinted in Brack, Jr., Chilton and Keithley's *The Miscellaneous Works of Tobias Smollett*, 2015). Smollett was also responsible for a translation of articles from the *Journal Oeconomique* as *Select Essays on Commerce, Agriculture, Mines, Fisheries, and other Useful Subjects* (1754). Even more telling, perhaps, is the portrait by Nathaniel Dance, which gives us Smollett in 1764, at the height of his fame as a historian and critic, with a volume by Le Sage displayed in his hand.

The introductions for the Georgia University Press edition of Smollett's translations (variously by Martin C. Battestin, O M Brack, Jr. and Leslie A. Chilton) are the best starting point for exploring this work. Leslie A. Chilton offers a summary in her essay "Smollett as a Professional Translator", describing Smollett's translations as a little known but "major contribution to history of English literature" (2007: 186). Smollett's own aims can be found in a translator's preface to *Don Quixote*: "He has endeavoured to retain the spirit and ideas," he writes, "without servilely adhering to the literal expression, of the original" (1755/2003: 20). In the case of *Don Quixote*, Smollett has been acknowledged as very successful (1755/2003: xlv); other attempts, such as the translation of *Telemachus*, have been seen as clumsier (1776/1997: xxvii). Even though Smollett's use of previous translations as ponies has been questioned, this no doubt allowed him to contribute what has been called a "fine satire on translator's notes" to his edition of *Don Quixote* (Hayes, 2009: 71). Indeed, the way Smollett makes use of other people's words is revealed to be a consistent literary practice across all of his creative and critical work. It is tempting to connect this practice to Smollett's situation as a "displaced literary Scot" (Beasley, 1998: 6–7). Given that he arrived in London, like the fictional Roderick Random after him, thinking and feeling in Scots, there is a sense in which all of Smollett's writing engages in a practice of translation. (For a recurring interest in Smollett's Scottishness, see M.A. Goldberg, *Smollett and the Scottish School: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Thought* (1959); Kenneth Simpson's *The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Literature* (1988) or Richard J. Jones, *Tobias Smollett and the Enlightenment: Travels through France, Italy and Scotland* (2011).)

The work of the novel

Not very long ago, Smollett's novels would have to have come first in a survey of his work. They have been positioned here, after a discussion of translation, in order to suggest some equivalence. Allowing for this equivalence means that Smollett's writing might contribute to an understanding of the field that Gillian Dow has described, in her article "Translation, Cross-Channel Exchanges and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century" (2014) but, understandably, finds difficult to name: "most scholars seem to recognise that translation shaped the European novel in some way, but very few are able to pinpoint exactly how" (694). In the case of Smollett, his novels have been shown to relate to his own translations in neat pairings: *Gil Blas*, for example, informs *Roderick Random*; *The Devil upon Crutches* influences *Peregrine Pickle*; *Don Quixote* has an impact on *The Life and Adventures of Lancelot Greaves* (1760–1/2002); and *Telemachus* quietly underwrites *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771/1990) (see Chilton, 2015). This approach, however, considers each novel to be the principal object of study. Is there a way to avoid such a hierarchical way of thinking? In a similar way, the introduction to *The Miscellaneous Works of Tobias Smollett* comes close to justifying the collection of texts by relating it to an improved understanding of *Humphry Clinker*. What might we gain by allowing these texts to sit alongside each other?

A number of studies of Smollett's novels have established themselves as essential reading – and I do not mean, by this initial provocation, to diminish them. Jerry C. Beasley in *Tobias Smollett: Novelist* (1998) asks "just what kind of

novelist was Smollett?" and "just what was his appeal in his own time?" (6). Beasley enriches previous scholarship by offering close readings of each of Smollett's five novels. In the background are two books from one of the sporadic periods of recovery for Smollett studies in the 1970s: Damian Grant's *Tobias Smollett: A Study in Style* (1977) and Paul-Gabriel Boucé's foundational work, *The Novels of Tobias Smollett* (1976). Also informing Beasley's starting point are Aileen Douglas, who turns to Smollett's novels to explore "his attempt to summon up the feeling body enmeshed in patterns of social and political order" (1995: xviii), as well as, for example, Robert Spector's study of Smollett's representation of women (1994) and John Skinner's attempt to avoid the word novel in favour of satire, romance, autobiography and heteroglossia (1996). As is implied by Douglas's title, *Uneasy Sensations*, or Skinner's view that Smollett is "barely a novelist at all" (20), each of these seminal works have had to face questions about the way Smollett fits into a history of the novel. It is perhaps only recently that such unease has begun to be faced in its own terms. Simon Dickie, for example, in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2015) observes that "No author sits less comfortably with the current emphasis on the politeness and sensibility of mid-century British culture, and no author is less amenable to feminist perspectives" (93); Dickie intends to find the relevance of Smollett's unlikeable and distasteful comedy. Similarly, Annika Mann, in her article on remediation (2012), shows how "Smollett illuminates a different literary history than that typically emphasised by studies of the novel" (366); Mark Blackwell, in an article addressing Smollett's status as an "outlier" (2011: 423), puts it more radically: "In Smollett's hands, 'the' novel falls to pieces" (424).

Given the challenges presented by Smollett's novels, it is perhaps no surprise that much critical attention has been directed towards finding coherence in them. A useful starting point, in this regard, is Smollett's novel *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753/1988). This contains Smollett's only known piece of theorizing on the novel: "A Novel", he writes, "is a large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groupes, and exhibited in various attitudes, for the purposes of an uniform plan, and general occurrence, to which every figure is subservient" (4). The hint that a novel might be understood visually, as a "picture", has been taken up by Pamela Cantrell, who suggests that "Smollett is ecphrastic; each scene is separate and complete within itself, yet contributes to the overall sense of the narrative" (1995: 72); Beasley finds that it was "the Hogarthian pictures he drew with his words that he cared most about as an artist" (1998: 225). Smollett's spatial form thus provides a way to reconcile some tensions in his work. It resembles the highly productive approach of John Warner, who, placing Smollett in an alternative line of novelistic descent to James Joyce, examines an interplay of historic and mythic language and "a 'revolutionary nostalgia' for the world of myth" (1993: xiii). Smollett's interest in "pictures" also takes more literal form through an interest in illustration: Robert Folkenflik has described how *Launcelot Greaves* was written alongside a practice of illustration (which pre-empted some details in the text) to become the first serialized novel in English (2002); William Gibson has done some preliminary work into the illustration of Smollett's historical projects (2007: 179–86). Intriguingly, Julian Fung has suggested that viewing later illustrations of Smollett's fiction sensitizes us to his words (2014). Even this slight survey, then, suggests how Smollett's novel

writing finds only temporary forms of coherence. What holds things together, according to Smollett (a little further on from the quotation from *Ferdinand Count Fathom* above), is “a principal personage”, which might well be identified with the author himself. In a recent essay, Lee F. Kahan has taken this approach to *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, seeing Smollett as mediator and Ferdinand as the embodiment of anxiety about “periodical intelligence”: Ferdinand becomes “the grotesque personification of the fragmented, empty, and meaningless nature of his ‘universal knowledge’ and its magazine form” (2009: 255–6) – something which Smollett was always trying to shape and control.

Magazine forms

If *Ferdinand Count Fathom* reveals some anxiety about the kind of knowledge that comes in “magazine form” (as Kahan suggests), then it perhaps also admits its attraction. In the 1750s and 60s, Smollett was engaged in a number of periodical projects: he co-founded the *Critical Review* in 1756; his *Complete History of England* appeared in weekly numbers and “continuations” from 1757–65; the *British Magazine*, for which Smollett owned the copyright, was published from 1760–6. Despite the heading above, this work should not be separated too rigidly from Smollett’s other writings. *Launcelot Greaves*, it might be noted, was published serially as part of the *British Magazine*. *Humphry Clinker* is often regarded as a “grab-bag of British life in the mid-1700s” (Gassman, 1971: 155); Smollett’s friend, John Moore, had earlier observed that “he hardly attempts any story” in it (Kelly, 1987: 272). Equally, we might see, in the “principal personage” disclosed by Smollett’s periodical projects, the unifying principle of a “large diffused picture” that is otherwise a novel.

There has been relatively little critical interest in Smollett’s work on the *Critical Review* and *British Magazine*. The notable exception is James Basker’s study, *Tobias Smollett: Critic and Journalist* (1988), which includes a list of the articles Smollett contributed to the *Critical* from 1756–67, along with the evidence for their attribution (220–78). In the case of the articles for 1756, the evidence is mostly derived from an annotated copy of the *Critical*, owned by Smollett’s co-founder, the printer Archibald Hamilton. Basker also provides a list of attributions for articles in the *British Magazine*. Basker’s work informs the selection of texts for Brack Jr., Chilton and Keithley’s *The Miscellaneous Writings of Tobias Smollett* (2015), which re-publishes some of Smollett’s editorial notes and reviews for the first time since the eighteenth century. Further attributions continue to be considered (for example by Wainwright, 2014). For Basker, Smollett’s journalistic work represents the “only concrete result” of a grander scheme: his plans to found an English academy of letters in 1755 (31). Traces of these plans can be found in Smollett’s “Proposals” (published in the *Public Advertiser* for 19 December 1755), which claim that “This work will not be patched up by obscure Hackney Writers, accidentally enlisted in the Service of an undistinguishing Bookseller, but executed by a Set of Gentlemen whose Characters and Capacities have been universally approved and acknowledged by the Public”. The notion that the *Critical Review* both is and is not the work of hackney writers is something that has informed my own interest in the review periodical. For me, the *Critical Review* seems to be a “work” that can only appear (as an allegory) amongst its fragments (Jones, 2019). In a similar way (and one which serves to strengthen the importance of Smollett’s interests in

illustration), William Gibson, in *Art and Money in the Writings of Tobias Smollett* (2007), has shown how Smollett's innovative reviews of art in the *Critical Review* were part of an attempt to appreciate the fine arts in a commercial marketplace.

In the same years that Smollett founded and contributed to the *Critical Review* and *British Magazine*, Smollett also established himself as a historian. Like his other periodical projects, Smollett's *Complete History* proceeded in instalments: the first three (quarto) volumes were published in 1757, the fourth in 1758, and the whole in a series of 110 (octavo) weekly numbers from 1758 to 60, which were continued, as the *Continuation of the Complete History*, in weekly numbers that were to eventually become five octavo volumes in 1765. Advertising for the *Complete History* in 1758 claimed that sales reached over 10,000 copies per week, meaning that this was an extraordinary public event. Even so, Smollett's History has attracted little critical attention – and I have suggested elsewhere that this is because of the way it was later combined with David Hume's *History of England* (1754–62), a set of volumes which obscured most of what was important about Smollett's achievement (Jones, 2018). The publication history of Smollett's *Complete History*, including its early relationship with Hume's work, has been outlined by Knapp (1936) and, more recently, by Ian Simpson Ross (2007). Donald Greene (1971), who offered a “reappraisal” of Smollett as a historian in the 1970s, found that he was engaged in cutting down some of Hume's text – a principle of abridgment (and perhaps remediation) that is easy to overlook, given the overall length of the work. James E. May (2007), has provided a descriptive bibliography of early editions of Smollett's *Complete History* – his conclusion that a critical edition would necessitate many times the “half dozen years” that Smollett took to write it is presented as testimony to Smollett's “scholarship and industry” – it is also, of course, the principal reason why there isn't one. A growing interest in Smollett's historical work is perhaps reflected in *The Miscellaneous Works of Tobias Smollett* (2015), which reprints some extracts from *The Present State of All Nations* (published in instalments in 1768–9). The introduction to the extracts notably remains indebted to Louis L. Martz's *Later Career of Tobias Smollett* (1942) – a study which draws out the qualities of “compilation” and “synthesis” in Smollett's work. Martz (1941) remains one of the few critics to have tackled Smollett's part in the 44 volumes of *The Modern Part of the Universal History* (1759–66). Complementing Smollett's role as a serial historian of the present is his journal in support of Bute's ministry, *The Briton* (1762–3). This has been republished in *Poems, Plays and The Briton* as one of the few examples of Smollett's “non-novelistic genres” (1993: xiii) – a statement which is, of course, more problematic than it appears.

Writing as event

Clifford Siskin and William Warner have identified the Enlightenment as an event, in the mid-eighteenth century, that might be understood as an effect of “proliferating mediations” (2010: 11). Smollett does not feature in their book of essays but there is good reason to regard his work as a similar “event”, emerging alongside – if not taking the very form – of the Enlightenment itself. What Smollett shows us is the work of writing: the interrelated practices of writing, reading and print in the context of unprecedented proliferation and influence (we might recall the interaction of print and “pictures” in his work). Seen this way, Smollett had no need of the Academy that he failed to establish – the

community he needed was, instead, increasingly printed and reprinted around him. His task was one of remediation and improvement. It was also urgent and exhausting. "If I go on writing as I have proceeded for some years," writes Smollett in 1759, "my hand will be paralytic, and my brain dried to a snuff" (Knapp, 1970: 85). But Smollett did go on writing. It was perhaps only when he reached his own saturation point (a point which Siskin and Warner have suggested marks the end of Enlightenment) that Smollett could accept his own demise.

If we were to look for a saturation point in Smollett's work, we might find one in the little-studied and (as Annika Mann describes it) "impossible to consume" text, *The History and Adventures of an Atom* (1768/1989). For Mann, the text of the *Atom* is "a compilation, a multiplication of mediums, and an explicit, massive remediation of all of the textual material of the Seven Years War" (2012: 376). Its mediums not only include "oral speeches and visual cartoons but also physiological mediums such as vomit, sweat and blood". In his edition of the *Atom* for Georgia University Press, Robert Adams Day provides details of these sources, including reprinting evidence of what he describes as "the wholesale borrowing of imagery from a particular nonliterary source" – "scurrilous prints" and political cartoons (1989: xlviii). Day distinguishes Smollett's "intention" ("a release of personal spleen and indignation") from the *Atom*'s "execution" ("a rewriting of all those works of Tobias Smollett that had dealt with recent history") and this helps him to align the text with Smollett's earliest writing – his verse satires, *Advice* (1746) and *Reproof* (1747)– and establish Smollett as "a son of Pope, Swift and Rabelais" (xxv). Smollett's poetry and plays are as little studied as the *Atom* (though his ode, *The Tears of Scotland* (1746) has recently been placed by John Richardson in a long tradition of war poetry (2017).) Even so, they also offer some further combinations of media: Chilton, for example, enquires into some of the mysteries surrounding *Alceste*, Smollett's libretto for a possible masque or opera (was it tragedy or farce?) to be set to music by Handel (2014). The notion that Smollett was primarily a poet is sometimes invoked to lift him above the proliferating mediations of the eighteenth century. Isaac D'Israeli, noting how Smollett "is a great poet though he has written little in verse", put it this way in 1812: "Who has displayed a more fruitful genius, and exercised more intense industry, with a loftier sense of his independence, than Smollett?" (Kelly, 1987: 330) This question, quoted approvingly in the entry for Smollett in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, has sent Smollett studies in a understandable – but, perhaps, increasingly confusing – direction. Smollett also displayed "dependence" on the printed world around him.

The work of Scottish writing

When Smollett wrote the saturated *Atom*, it is likely that he was living in Nice. His account of this period, *Travels through France and Italy*, might be seen as a similar reworking of textual materials – including Smollett's previous writing in medicine, theatre, art criticism and history (Jones, 2011). On the two-hundred and fiftieth anniversary of "one of the greatest travel books of all time", Frank Felsenstein gave an appropriately personal overview of its reception history, noting its "notorious", "incendiary" and Enlightened qualities (2016). The image of Smollett as a "traveller" has proved to be a useful one, less because of the title

of G.M. Kahrl's study *Tobias Smollett: Traveler Novelist* (1949) than for his suggestion that Smollett "was an alien for most of his life and permanently retained the point of view of a traveler" (148). It has been suggested, by Juliet Shields, that this position, "beyond the pale", is one that Smollett marked out as "British" (2015); however we might also accept it as an expression of Scottishness. For Rivka Swenson (2016), the "topos of the intrepid Scottish traveller" (96) offers Smollett a form of recovery (rather than victimization); her framing of Smollett's interests in the light of the 1707 Act of Union develops Thomas Keymer's account (2015) of the way in which Smollett questions the "capacity of stable perspectives and linear stories to represent the modern nation" (435).

In a recent collection of essays, edited by Ralph McLean, Ronnie Young and Kenneth Simpson, Smollett's work is presented as an example of one of the "contact points between the philosophical, the scientific, the critical, the religious, and the imaginative that gave creative spark to Scottish literary endeavors in the eighteenth century" (2016: 9). Catherine Jones (2016) thus discusses Smollett's combination of fictional and nonfictional travel writing in the context of medical botany. The insight of the book (that the "creative" and "critical" are interrelated in the period) offers a promising direction for Smollett Studies. Some related work in this area includes recent enquiries into Smollett's medical writing: Adam Mason (2013), for example, observes Smollett's inventions in debates on the waters at Bath (in the context of more "knight errantry"); Kathleen Tamayo Alves explores how "language-based humour embodies discourses of the medicalised [female] body" (2015: 350); and Douglas Duhaime picks up on Smollett's medical training in Scotland to suggest how he transferred his understanding of the "hydraulic body" to political models (2014). The notion that health is found "in the middling ground between inanition and excess" (591) speaks to the difficulties of Smollett's own hard-won (in)dependence.

The phrase "Scottish writing", rather than "Scottish Enlightenment", has been used here to avoid the same set of problems as those associated with the term "novel" or, indeed, "literature". As McLean, Young and Simpson observe, in speaking of literature and the Scottish Enlightenment, we are faced with "the clash of two Victorian concepts" (3). To avoid this clash and bring Smollett's concerns to light, it seems necessary to turn to a longer history of writing. As we approach the three-hundredth anniversary of his birth, Smollett continues to present his readers with some challenges. If, on taking up these challenges, the novel falls to pieces – then, perhaps we should just let it. If we find that Smollett's writing is, in some sense, indistinguishable from the words of others – then, perhaps, that is how he spoke. Many lines are blurred by the kind of creative-critical (or we might say translation) work in which Smollett was engaged. To meet Smollett's challenges, we will need to turn our attention to the work of writing – not only in terms of what it does but in the sense of the relentless labour that informs it.

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