

Tobias Smollett  
or, How a Gentleman of Scotland and London Experienced the  
Formation of the British Identity

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A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Approved April 2011 by the  
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

April 2011

## ABSTRACT

Tobias Smollett was an eighteenth-century surgeon, writer, novelist, and editor. He was a Scotsman who sought his fortune in south Briton. Throughout his life and career he experienced many of the cultural and political influences that helped to shape the British identity. His youth as a Lowland Scot, student and apprentice, and naval surgeon enabled him to embrace this new identity. His involvement in nearly every aspect of the publishing process in London enabled him to shape, define, and encourage this identity. His legacy, through his works and his life story, illustrates the different ways in which the United Kingdom and its inhabitants have been perceived throughout the centuries. As a prominent man of his time and an enduring literary figure to this day, Smollett offers an ideal prism through which to view the formation of the British identity.

DEDICATION

For Stephen.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members for all their time and effort in helping me develop and complete this thesis. I was introduced to Tobias Smollett in an undergraduate course taught by Dr. Retha Warnicke. I do not know what I would have done without her guidance and encouragement over the past five years. Dr. Christine Szuter's advice and insight into the publishing industry, as well as her enthusiasm, helped me in forming and fine-tuning my argument. Dr. Kent Wright was invaluable in helping me consider Smollett as a man of the eighteenth century, on the fringes of the Enlightenment. I would also like to thank Dr. O.M. Brack, who was gracious enough to meet with a fellow "Smollett enthusiast" and share decades of experience and knowledge. To many members of the History department, including Dr. Janelle Warren-Findley and Nancy Dallett, I would like to extend my thanks for giving me the resources and skills I needed to complete this thesis. And to all my colleagues and friends, within and without the department, thank you for making this process, and the last two years, an enlightening and marvelous experience.

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## PREFACE

This is not a biography. My goal in writing this paper is not to track the life of Tobias Smollett—that’s been done before. My goal is to use Smollett, as Barbara Tuchman would term it, as my “prism of history.” In *Practicing History*, Tuchman describes how she uses biography as a manageable method to tell a much grander narrative. “Biography is useful,” she explains, “because it encompasses the universal in the particular.”<sup>1</sup> She describes how throughout the research for *A Distant Mirror*, the character of Coucy came to offer more and more perspective on the time. The more she looked into his history, the places he’d gone, the people he’d met, “the more he offered.”<sup>2</sup> By focusing on one individual, an otherwise overwhelming task—like fourteenth-century history, perhaps—was much less daunting and, furthermore, much more digestible.

I was first introduced to Smollett during an undergraduate course on British travelers. I chose him because his charmingly scurrilous style of writing, his obvious irascibility, and his keen eye and appreciation for the world around him made him a captivating travel writer. It never occurred to me he might have much more to offer me when I turned my focus to eighteenth-century British culture.

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Tuchman, *Practicing History* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

Like Coucy, the more I read of him, the more Smollett seemed to me to be at the very center of eighteenth century artistic, cultural, and political life, especially in regard to the development of British identity, which gradually became my focus. His grandfather signed the Acts of Union in 1706. His first-hand account of naval life during the Battle of Cartagena came to define that event for generations. He followed the flood of Scottish professionals to London in the 1740s. His novels were some of the most widely-read well into the nineteenth century. He conversed with Richardson and fought with Johnson. He and Carlyle faced the London mobs in the aftermath of Culloden, sword in hand. He defended the ministry of Lord Bute and faced all the anti-Scottish sentiment London could muster. His *Critical Review* heavily influenced Britain's literary culture, and his *History of England*, its narrative. A self-defined Briton, Smollett had a front-row seat to the events of the eighteenth century. He is an ideal prism.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Though Tobias Smollett has been studied in the past, it seems that he has for the most part been viewed through a literary lens. I would, instead, like to place Smollett in his historical context, to study him as a man of his particular time and place. Smollett can then become, as Barbara Tuchman might term it, our very own “prism of history.” Through examining his historical context, his life, his career, and his legacy, I hope to place Tobias Smollett at the forefront of the eighteenth century stage.

My thesis will consist of three chapters, the first dedicated to the life of Smollett himself. As a Scotsman who trained in surgery then went south to London to make his fortune in the literary marketplace, Smollett’s life illustrates quite nicely the changing notions of professional and national identity throughout the century. My second chapter will consist of an examination of Smollett’s career in the publishing industry at the time, particularly as it relates to the Scottish Enlightenment. Eighteenth-century literary culture created a unique opportunity for cooperation between Scotland and England; the legacy of Smollett and his peers was a corpus of literature that widened the national dialogue for issues beyond identity and societal



mores. In my final chapter, I will attempt to track how Smollett's name and reputation have come to be understood over the years, as a Scotsman, a Brit, a writer, a physician, a student, a satirist, a traveler, a professional, and an artist. Smollett garnered mixed reviews during his time, not least because of his nationality. And since his death he has been alternately praised and scorned, mocked and lauded, studied widely and neglected. I cannot help but conjecture that these ebbs and flows of popularity and approval do not still reflect on the changing notions of national identity that still persist to this day. While my thesis is to all outward appearances the story of a man, upon further examination it becomes the story of a nation, an industry, and a century as a whole.

### **Historical Context**

Smollett's Britain was a nation in transition. Between the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the Reform Act of 1832, Great Britain saw innumerable changes at all levels of society. The Great Britain of 1832 seems hardly recognizable to what it was in the seventeenth century. The classic hierarchical structure of Stuart England shifted over that century into a society where the elite still ruled, but with rather a stronger sense of the presence and power of the middling and lower classes. English society became increasingly urban, industrial,

and literate, and though poverty was still present, social mobility and increased political participation were increasingly possible. Through union between Scotland and Ireland there emerged an empire with a tenuous yet definite sense of British identity. Even the domination of the Anglican Church was being tempered by increased tolerance and growing religious apathy. Ultimately, eighteenth-century Britain was a site of social, economic, religious, and political change.

The political structure of the British Empire shifted perceptibly throughout the century. James II's effective abdication left the government struggling to reconcile kingship and parliamentary control, but the constant insecurities of the century meant that king and parliament would maintain a steady codependence. Previously the parliament had been made up of two predominant parties, the Whigs and Tories. After the Glorious Revolution the pro-Anglican, pro-monarchy Tories were increasingly relegated to opposition status. Their cause was largely unpopular due to their problems with the new monarchy, as well as their association with other opposition groups such as the Jacobites. Politics were often thought of in terms of "court" and "country" politics, further conflating relations. Furthermore, the increasing importance of the press, as demonstrated through the Wilkite and Wyvillite movements, and philosophical ideals, like the social contract promulgated by Locke and Hobbes, prepared the way

for the popular voice in politics. Perhaps the government's most defining characteristic was the influence of the Prime Ministers—most notably Walpole, Pelham, Bute, North, and the Pitts—whose sheer personal force and ability steered the government through countless crises, conflicts, and coronations. It was a period of reform, and the British government showed itself to be remarkably capable of handling the many changes it faced.

The dominating force of religion seemed to be experiencing monumental changes as well. Though the Church of England maintained its power and even grew throughout the century, there were definite signs of increased religious pluralism. The religious toleration of the Stuart reign that so horrified the nation would be shown even by parliament in the 1800s. The followers of dissenting religions were increasingly permitted to worship as they chose. The Papist Act of 1778 even allowed clemency for the Catholics (though the Gordon Riots were a clear indication that this was by no means a smooth transition). The Anglican Church could not attend to the needs of an increasingly diverse population and, as people increasingly identified with their classes, politics, and nations, religion began to lose its dominance.

Britain possessed a fluid culture. Traditional agrarian hierarchy was fading as more and more people moved to London and other urban

centers to ply a myriad of trades. Floods of newcomers arrived from Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and beyond and the new population meant a new dynamic for society as a whole. Though the House of Lords and the king remained, the voice of the people was beginning to demand attention. Despite the upheaval, the nation was solid enough to weather these changes. And with a tenuous grasp on stability, Great Britain began to focus its energies outward, expanding an empire that was an increasing source of pride for its inhabitants. It is within this context that we place our protagonist, Tobias Smollett, Scottish physician turned British man of letters.

## **Life**

It is understandable that in the century of David Hume, Adam Smith, Samuel Johnson, Adam Ferguson, Montesquieu, and Benjamin Franklin, a satirical novelist from a tiny Scottish hamlet could get lost in the mix. Yet to allow that would be a terrible mistake. Though he has been often overlooked in the past centuries, he provides an excellent prism through which to view the events of the century, from the Unification to the Scottish Enlightenment, from the “Celtic invasion” of England to the Jacobite rebellions, from the glory days of Grub Street to the professionalization of the publishing industry, from an island at war with itself to an Empire in the making. Smollett was

there and he wrote about it all—with a candor few others would dare to venture.

The life of Tobias Smollett provides an excellent examination of the cultural dynamics that influenced British society throughout the eighteenth century. Smollett was born and raised in Dunbartonshire, Scotland. His grandfather, Lord James Smollett, had served in Parliament during the Act of Union. Smollett attended the University of Glasgow, and took an apprenticeship in medicine. In 1739, before he had completed his apprenticeship, Smollett set out for London. One year later he joined the navy as a surgeon's mate in the war against Spain. He remained with the navy until 1742, and sailed to the Caribbean, where he met and married a plantation owner's daughter, Anne Lasselles. In 1743 he moved back to London to start a medical practice, though his true desire was for a career in literature.

He spent the next thirty years honing his career as a novelist, editor, critic, and ultimately prolific man of letters. His sharp tongue and fearless contribution to the political dialogue gained him both friends and enemies, and he was imprisoned for libel at one point for defaming an English politician. Following the death of his daughter in 1763 he undertook a health tour on the continent, adding the appellation *travel writer* to his resume in the process. Upon his return to England in 1765, he continued to work tirelessly until his health

declined and he and his wife retired to Italy, where he died in 1771. Ultimately, Smollett's life and career demonstrate the fluidity that existed between England and Scotland, as he was Scottish-born and London-made.

Smollett's career as a writer illustrates the power of the printed word in defining and influencing eighteenth century culture, politics, and society. A member of the tight-knit group of Scottish intellectuals who frequented London's literary scene, his career was directly affected by the turbulent relations between Scotland and England throughout the century. His ruthless satire of society on both sides of the channel provides a unique and powerful perspective on cultural mores, living conditions, and interpersonal relationships. As a novelist, an editor, a critic, a translator, a poet, a playwright, and a travel writer, Smollett experienced and contributed to nearly every aspect of the publishing process.

## **Career**

Smollett came to London with a play under his arm and high hopes of seeing it performed at one of the many theaters in Covent Garden. This thwarted desire embittered him greatly against the literary establishment he would come to join and define. Though "The Regicide" never was performed, it was later published, along with six

novels, at least three major poems, one massive history of England, a travelogue, several translations of famous French and Spanish works, and many medical treatises. At the same time he edited a multi-volume history of the world, two long-running periodicals, a compendium of travelogues, and many other publications. Any one of these tasks might take a modern writer a dozen years to finish. For the writers of Grub Street, they were seemingly daily fare—and Smollett worked himself to ill health to become one of the most prolific.

The number of Britons with the time, economic means, and taste for literature grew throughout the eighteenth century, and the publishing industry flourished. Smollett was one of the new class of professional writers who churned out a dizzying, seemingly endless stream of words to keep up with the demand. Aided by advances in technology and legislation, most notably the lapse of the 1692 Licensing Act and the passing of the Copyright Act in 1709, more booksellers and printers appeared, and more authors emerged to fill the pages. Along with the relatively new form of novels, a myriad of periodicals, pamphlets, poems, religious booklets, and scholarly works flooded the streets of Britain. Books appeared in many different formats, from the readily accessible duodecimo and octavo (small, cheaper formats) to the dignified and costly quarto and folio, to satisfy all manner of taste and means. As Smollett would himself experience,

these books were made through a complicated system of patronship, copyright, marketing, and collaboration.

In this environment the Scottish Enlightenment emerged. These writers were for the most part born in Edinburgh and other Scottish towns, and based their practices in Edinburgh and London. These men—among whom Richardson, Smollett, and later Burns, were most prominent—wrote across all genres including science, history, fiction, and philosophy. Hostile conditions in the south brought many of these men together in the coffee shops and clubs of London, and ties of kinship and friendship gave them a vested interest in the success of their peers. Many of these men were adamant supporters of the union and its advantages for their home country.

As literature became a means of communication across society, it became the standard for cultural discourse as well. As works by prominent writers on both sides of the Tweed River grew in popularity and influence, a sort of national sympathy emerged. Common themes, such as a disdain for the aristocracy, and a distrust of those on the continent, drew English and Scottish readers together. This common ground, along with the romanticization of the Celtic countries by writers like Sir Walter Scott toward the end of the century, resulted in a national narrative that held John Bull supreme, with Scotland and its highlands as a sort of nostalgic ideal. By examining the ways in



which the publishing industry grew and advanced throughout the century, one can see the emergence of not only an economical but a cultural united identity.

### **Legacy**

Smollett passed away in the fall of 1771 in Italy, only months after the publication of his last and most famous work, *The Adventures of Humphrey Clinker*. Throughout his life he had gained a reputation for himself as a pugnacious yet sensitive, irascible yet achingly generous, cultured and thoroughly Scottish figure. His existence as a Scotsman in the treacherous social world of London garnered him attention as both praiseworthy and distasteful. He was a common figure in the city periodicals, was caricatured in the works of others—most notably Sterne—and he often found himself in legal disputes for his outspokenness. His wrath when his reputation was called into question was notorious—countless contemporary figures were lampooned in his writings, and he even served prison time for libel. To say the least Smollett was well-known in his time.

Yet his popularity and influence persisted long into the next century. Long held as a member of the English literary canon, he inspired generations of great authors, from Charles Dickens to George Orwell. His *History of England* was hugely popular well into the

nineteenth century. The *Critical Review* he helped to found was a staple of literary consumption for decades. His translations offered continental literature to his English-speaking countrymen, and his poetry inspired readers on both sides of the Anglo-Scottish border. Scholars of English literature to this day study his works for their artistic skill and historical themes. Smollett's literary contributions have been critiqued and examined countless times, and continue to provide subjects for analysis of eighteenth century literature to this day.

Along with his literary forays, Smollett has been the subject of numerous biographies, from Robert Anderson's *The Life of Tobias Smollett MD with Critical Observations on His Works* published in 1796, to Sir Walter Scott's 1870 biography to Jeremy Lewis' *Tobias Smollett*, which came out in 2004. He remains a subject of fascination for those interested in the publishing industry and in eighteenth century cultural life in general. He has been judged, not always favorably, as both an artist and a Scotsman.

It is my hope that by examining these reviews, critiques, biographies, and anecdotes I can illustrate what these reflections have to tell us about the relationship between Smollett and the British Identity throughout the centuries since his death. Whether it be the scorn and praise he received in his own lifetime, the disdain felt

toward him by the Victorian sensibility, or the rekindling of interest that has appeared for eighteenth century studies in the last few decades. How Smollett has been received in different times and in different places can offer a brilliant lens through which to view changing perspectives of his time, his culture, and his national identity.

By absorbing its culture, politics, economy, science, beliefs, diversions, and religion, I hope to get a sense of everyday life in the eighteenth century. I want to discover and describe London in all its filth, chaos, change, and creativity. From this solid foundation I hope to form a firm sense of how and why the British identity emerged when it did. I would like to uncover the players, their motivations, and their means. And within this fleshed out image of the era I would like to place Tobias Smollett. I want to get a sense of who he was, and how he has come to mean so much—and so little—to so many people. And I'd like to reaffirm his place as a prime mover of the time, to place him at the forefront of the publishing industry that led to the Scottish Enlightenment that led to the British Empire.

## Chapter 2

### BECOMING BRITISH: THE EARLY LIFE OF TOBIAS SMOLLETT, 1721–1744

*'Tis impossible to the put the lively Sound of the Cannon  
just now firing, into any other Note to my Ear  
than the articulate Expression of UNION, UNION  
-DANIEL DEFOE, REVIEW MAY 29, 1707*

On the evening of May 29, 1707, men in coffeehouses across Britain were doubtless rapt in conversation about the day's news. Parliament had finally passed the most contentious issue of the day, about which thousands had breathlessly written and read pamphlets, listened to sermons, issued parliamentary addresses, and argued over glasses of claret. Centuries of complicated struggle and cooperation resulted in one of the most critical points in the history of the island. Scotland and England were united under parliament, and Great Britain was born.

The union between Scotland and England was a long time in the making. Ever since the kingdoms of Scotland and England had been consolidated and solidified around the tenth and eleventh centuries, the two countries had engaged in a power struggle due to “the

unconquerability of one and the invincibility of the other.”<sup>3</sup> The countries were united royally with the union of the crowns in 1603, when Scotland’s James VI succeeded Elizabeth I as James I, ruler of Scotland, England, and Ireland. As a “Scot who was pleased to live in London,” James VI and I succeeded in keeping his kingdoms “together, and apart, and in peace.”<sup>4</sup> This era of relative peace was challenged by the events of the seventeenth century; the English Civil War, and then the Glorious Revolution, challenged Scottish and English perceptions of themselves and the ways in which they wanted to be led. At the end of the century, the 1701 Act of Settlement ensured a Protestant monarchy after the death of Queen Anne. The crown would pass over the heads of fifty Catholic descendents to land on that of George Lewis of Hanover, Germany. The majority of Scots supported this decision, but those in favor of Anne’s brother, Catholic James Edward Stuart, were bitterly opposed to the settlement. These Jacobites, as they came to be called, and the would-be king they supported, posed a threat to the nation’s Protestant future, and talks began to forge a political as well as a royal union.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 41.

<sup>4</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 37.

Culturally, the two nations had always had similarities, most especially in the Scottish lowlands and the English north. Religiously, both nations were overwhelmingly Protestant, though the Kirk of Scotland was Presbyterian while the Church of England was Episcopalian. Economically the two countries were increasingly tied together, especially as improvements in travel and communication increased commerce and commute between them. Union may have seemed a logical answer—after all, the new nation would be “marked out by sea, clear, incontrovertible, apparently pre-ordained.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet by the beginning of the eighteenth century there were many on both sides of the border who vehemently opposed the union. The English feared an influx of Scots, whom they viewed as “poor and pushy relations, unwilling to pay their full share of taxation, yet constantly demanding access to English resources.”<sup>6</sup> And in Scotland, while some affiliation with England was generally supported, many saw complete incorporation as a threat to Scottish self-determination. Incorporation would render Scotland’s economic and political systems vulnerable to those of England. The political capital would be moved

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<sup>5</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 13.

four hundred miles, or “two weeks’ journey-time”<sup>7</sup> away to London; Scotland would have less representation in the Parliament even than Wales; the Presbyterian Church of Scotland could fall prey to the Episcopalian leanings of the Church of England, and, perhaps most importantly, England would be rewarded for their treatment of Scotland.

John Hamilton, Lord Belhaven, was one of the most adamant opponents of the Union. In a poignant speech given to Parliament in 1706 he claimed:

We are the Successors of our Noble Predecessors who founded our Monarchy, framed our Laws...without the Assistance or Advice of any Foreign Power or Potentate, and who during the time of 2000 years, have handed them down to us a free Independent Nation, with the hazard of their Lives and Fortunes; Shall we not then argue for that, which our Progenitors has [sic] purchased for us at so dear a Rate and with so much Immortal Honour and Glory? GOD forbid.<sup>8</sup>

Many other writers called upon Scotland’s rich legacy of independence and strength to oppose the union. In a particularly vivid bit of satire by William Wright, *The Comical History of the Marriage Betwixt Fergusia and Heptarchus*<sup>9</sup>, Scotland is portrayed as “a Lady of venerable Antiquity,” and England as “Young, and Lusty, very opulent

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<sup>7</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 44.

<sup>8</sup> John Hamilton, Lord Belhaven. *The Lord Belhaven’s speech in Parliament* (Edinburgh: for the author, 1706).

and Rich, and upon that account a great Contemner of his Neighbours.” Heptarchus (England) tells Fergusia (Scotland), “I’m passionate to possess that shining Beauty and Vertues [sic] I have so long beheld in you.”<sup>10</sup> The theme of this satire, printed seven years after the Union, harkens back to Belhaven’s claims of Scotland’s cultural purity and innate nobility. Curiously enough, though used in protest, these ideals would come to be incorporated throughout the century as the backbone of the British nation itself. Walter Scott and the Romantics would use the notion of the wild, ancient Highlands as a focus of the myth of Britain as a whole.

The more radical opponents to Union may have suggested that there was a perfectly good monarchy available that had equal if not more right to the throne than the Hanoverians. James Edward Stuart, religion aside, was ideal for the throne—certainly more so than a German who spoke only a few words of English. These considerations would, of course, be taken very seriously in the wake of the Jacobite uprisings that plagued Britain throughout the early 1700s. Though most Jacobites were hesitant to keep quiet about these affairs, a fair amount of support for independence came from those who would see the Scottish, Catholic Stuarts back on the throne.

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<sup>10</sup> William Wright, *The Comical History of the Marriage betwixt Fergusia and Heptarchus* (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Brown, 1717), 3, 5, 8.



Others, like Daniel Defoe, staunchly supported union as a means of advancing both countries. They claimed union offered Scotland increased military protection and economic strength. They saw union not so much a process of Anglicization, in which England would be the ruler, but rather a “vast conjunction” of heterogeneous parts united for their common good. It was to be a “union of policy...not a union of affection.”<sup>11</sup> Defoe even claimed union would grant the Scots unprecedented benefits. In his *History of the Union Between England and Scotland*, he stated that during the reign of James I, “The English parliament refused to give a declaration for naturalizing the Scots in England, thereby denying them...the benefits of equal trade...and, in short, preferment of any kind.”<sup>12</sup> One pamphlet, sometimes attributed to Defoe, titled *The Advantages of Scotland by an incorporate union with England*, went so far as to claim that the union was “the Best, the Safest, and the most Advantageous Measures, Scotland is capable of taking, for the Security of her Future Peace, a Flourishing Trade, and its Establisht [sic] Church Government.”<sup>13</sup> This idea, that the “Scottish

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<sup>11</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The History of the Union Between England and Scotland* (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1786), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Unknown, *The Advantages of Scotland by an incorporate union with England* (Edinburgh: Printed for the author, 1706), 1.

people can best be served by no longer being Scottish,”<sup>14</sup> while met with caution and even outrage at first, seems to have become widely accepted by Scottish professionals and politicians in the following decades.

After all the debate, the Scottish and English parliaments signed the Acts of Union in 1707. The Articles of Union, first drafted in 1706, declared Scotland and England would “forever after, be united into one Kingdom, by the Name of Great-Britain.”<sup>15</sup> The Articles maintained a strictly Protestant line of succession; a united parliament in London; open trade and navigation between the kingdoms; one united fleet of ships; consolidated taxes, including those on liquor, salt, and land; a common currency; standard weights and measures, and common laws on “Publick Right, Policy, and Civil Government.”<sup>16</sup> Henceforth all laws made would be held throughout Great Britain. One military would protect the interests of one three-part nation. One parliament, with sixteen Scottish members of the House of Lords, and

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<sup>14</sup> Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation, 1707–1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Articles of the Treaty of Union Agreed on by the Commissioners of Both Kingdoms on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, 1706* (Edinburgh: Printed by the Heirs and Successors of Andrew Anderson, Printer to the Queen’s most Excellent Majesty, 1706).

<sup>16</sup> *Articles of Union*, 11

forty-five in the House of Commons, would offer a chance for voices to be heard from the Highlands to Cornwall. Ultimately, as Robert Colls stated,

Scottish parliamentarians had voted to abolish themselves and move south...Great Britain was begun. Britons waited to be forged. If the English had not been able to take Scotland, by arms, from London, then in 1707 Scottish MPs had been persuaded to come to London and be taken.<sup>17</sup>

Yet Scotland still maintained some semblances of self-governance. The Articles ensured that Scotland would not be subjected to taxes, conflicting laws, or other changes made prior to the Union. Furthermore, Scottish royal boroughs were to be maintained, as were the Scottish court system, the education system, and the official church. Some, like Colin Kidd, have suggested that this attempt to allow Scotland to maintain its everyday systems was a way to “allow Scots to adjust gradually to what was in effect their absorption within the English state.”<sup>18</sup> In this regard, for most Scots, Union was “of only marginal relevance to their lives.”<sup>19</sup> But whether it was, as Defoe suggested, the natural melding of two nations that had always been

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<sup>17</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Colin Kidd, “North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms,” *The Historical Journal* (Vol. 39, 2, 1996), 364.

<sup>19</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 12.

closely intertwined, or a political move to secure a Protestant succession, Britons, and Scots especially, began almost immediately to benefit from the events of 1707.

Toward the bottom of the first row of signatories on the original Act of Union, written by the Scottish parliament in 1706, is the barely discernable name, J. Smollett. This is none other than Sir James Smollett, of Stainflett and Bonhill. Sir James garnered royal favor through his support of the Glorious Revolution in 1689. In fact, “so great was the part Sir James Smollett took in influencing public sentiment in favour [sic] of William and Mary...that the grateful monarch knighted him, and the Earl of Argyll appointed him deputy lieutenant of Dunbartonshire.”<sup>20</sup> In his political role, Sir James participated heavily in first garnering support for, then framing the articles of, the union of Scotland and England. He was subsequently elected to represent Dunbartonshire in the first British parliament in 1707.

The character of the Old Judge in Tobias Smollett’s *The Adventures of Roderick Random* is commonly thought to represent Sir James. Smollett describes him as “a gentleman of considerable fortune and influence, who had, on many occasions, signalized himself in

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<sup>20</sup> Oliphant Smeaton, *Tobias Smollett, Famous Scots Series* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1897), 13.

behalf of his country.”<sup>21</sup> Sir James married Jane Macauley, daughter of (the rather unfortunately named) Sir Auley Macauley of Ardincaple, and together they had six children. Their youngest son, Archibald Smollett, has been considered by posterity as a physically weak, even sickly, ineffectual younger son. As Smeaton colorfully described him, “the characteristic of the rolling rock was pre-eminently his...his health was bad, his morals were bad, his prospects were bad.”<sup>22</sup> Typical of many wealthy younger sons, Archibald “received a liberal education, but was bred to no profession.”<sup>23</sup> He studied at university in Leyden, but apparently came out with no profitable skills.

In 1716 Archibald married Barbara Cunningham, “without his father’s sanction and without means to support a wife.”<sup>24</sup> She was the daughter of Robert Cunningham of Gilbertfield, and a woman of “distinguished understanding, taste, and elegance,”<sup>25</sup> despite her lack

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<sup>21</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (New York: Signet Press, 1964), 21.

<sup>22</sup> Smeaton, *Smollett*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, *The Life of Tobias Smollett, MD, with Critical Observations on his Works* (London: J. Mundell & Co., 1796), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Chambers, “Tobias Smollett,” *Chambers Encyclopedia: A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge* Vol. IX (London: William & Robert Chambers Ltd., 1892), 524.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, 7.

of fortune. Though the “imprudent couple”<sup>26</sup> had not sought his blessing, Sir James bestowed on his son a house and property in Dalquhurn, not far from the family estate. The property came with an annual income of three hundred pounds.<sup>27</sup> By these means Archibald and Barbara set up a comfortable existence, and together they had three children, James, Jane, and a younger son, Tobias.

Tobias Smollett was born in 1721, and was baptized two days later. Unfortunately, Archibald Smollett passed away shortly after Tobias was born, leaving Barbara and her children “entirely dependent on the bounty of their grandfather.”<sup>28</sup> Sir James and his successive heir, also named James Smollett, kept the family on at the house in Dalquhurn. They “seem to have behaved with reasonable kindness to the widow, a clever managing woman, and her three orphan children.”<sup>29</sup> But the family was by no means wealthy, and Smollett would have grown up destined to enter a profession.

Smollett spent his childhood around the grounds of present day Renton, about twenty miles northwest of Glasgow. Much comment has

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<sup>26</sup> Chambers, “Tobias Smollett,” 524.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Chambers, “Tobias Smollett,” 524.

been made of the physical beauty of the place. In *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, Smollett's patriarch, Matthew Bramble, describes:

A romantic glen or clift of a mountain, covered with hanging woods, having at bottom a stream of fine water that forms a number of cascades in its descent to join the Leven; so that the scene is quite enchanting.<sup>30</sup>

Being in the lowlands, Dalquhurn would have been more similar to the north of England than to other parts of Scotland like the Highlands. In fact, "in Highland eyes these two peoples were virtually indistinguishable, and both were equally alien."<sup>31</sup> This fascinating north-south divide in Scotland accounts for the comparative ease with which lowland Scots integrated into British society, while the Highlands proved far more contentious. Smollett was also a member of "that upper class of Scottish society—lawyers and landed gentry,"<sup>32</sup> which means his family would have come in contact far more frequently with the culture and politics of the south—as evidenced by Sir James's involvement in both the Glorious Revolution and the Union of 1707.

Finally, Smollett's Presbyterian upbringing would have affiliated him more strongly with Protestant England than with the

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<sup>30</sup> Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 250.

<sup>31</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Chambers, "Tobias Smollett," 523.

predominantly Catholic Highlands. His anti-Catholicism is evident in many of his works, most especially *Travels Through France and Italy*. In France he scorns their “high masses, their feasts, their processions, their pilgrimages, confessions, images, tapers, robes, incense, benedictions, spectacles, representations, and innumerable ceremonies, which revolve almost incessantly.”<sup>33</sup>

The importance of religion in unifying Scotland and England cannot be overstated. Their Protestantism, though of differing varieties, allowed them to rally closely together against “who and what they are not,”<sup>34</sup> namely, the Catholic continent. While Smollett by no means integrated seamlessly into the English culture, his home, his family, and his religion aligned him much more closely with the English than with some of his own countrymen. And this placed him perfectly amongst those Scotsman who, in going south, first became north Britons.

## **Student**

Throughout the eighteenth century education was changing dramatically across Britain. In his book, *New Trends in Education in*

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<sup>33</sup> Tobias Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy* (Evanston, Illinois: Northern University Press, 1997), 38.

<sup>34</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 6.



*the Eighteenth Century*, Nicholas Hahn suggested that, under the influence of religious, intellectual, and utilitarian thought, schools throughout Britain “endeavoured to break through the rigidity of the established tradition and to introduce new subjects and new methods.”<sup>35</sup> Private tutors for the aristocracy were slowly replaced with the uniformly familiar Eton–Oxbridge pattern; curriculum increasingly focused on the empirical and the practicable versus the classical and the theoretical; unprecedented numbers of children, both boys and girls, were given access to education.

Education proved crucial in instilling ideas of patriotism and common history in the new British nation. Even aside from the mass displays of school-aged patriotism that characterized the early nineteenth century, the flourishing of education created a national dialogue. The “enormous expansion of educational opportunities,”<sup>36</sup> increased literacy rates, and the widening distribution of literature meant that schoolchildren could be exposed to the same stories and ideas across the country.<sup>37</sup> While this inculcation became widespread toward the end of the eighteenth century, that more children were

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<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Hahn, *New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1951), 209.

<sup>36</sup> Frank O’Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688–1832* (London: Arnold, 1997), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 226.

being educated—this “movement for mass education”<sup>38</sup>—paved the way for a more enlightened, common discourse as they came of age.

While England had the more developed system of education, Scotland was more democratized. As Oliphant Smeaton commented, “the Scots pride in giving children a good education wherewith to begin the world.”<sup>39</sup> In fact, the 1696 School Act, passed by the Scottish Parliament, required every parish to support a school and schoolmaster. Traditionally, public schools were the “preserves of the aristocracy,”<sup>40</sup> while the offspring of the professional class attended grammar schools, and the lower classes received an education at parish schools. In Scotland these class divides were by no means as stringent, and children across all social spectrums could attend parish schools, for instance.

Starting at a young age Smollett attended Dunbarton Grammar School, where he received “the rudiments of classical learning.”<sup>41</sup> He was instructed by the renowned scholar and grammarian John Love, a man Smollett later praised as “the man from whose instruction I

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<sup>38</sup> Hans, *New Trends*, 209.

<sup>39</sup> Smeaton, *Smollett*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Hans, *New Trends*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, Xv.

imbibed the first Principles of my Education.”<sup>42</sup> In his grammar school, Smollett became proficient in Latin, and may also have learned Greek, English, music, and calligraphy. By all accounts Smollett was a promising student, displaying “the most promising marks of that fertility of genius which characterized his future life.”<sup>43</sup> He was also a bit of a trickster, displaying throughout his school days a “love of frolic, practical jest, and playful mischief.”<sup>44</sup> While his “mischievous propensities”<sup>45</sup> would get him into trouble throughout his life, his keen wit and apparent affinity for education would benefit him in any profession he chose. At the time the major options for a young man were the military, the clergy, trade, the law, and medicine.

Smollett had initially desired to join the army, but his older brother James received a commission for the navy, and even landed families would be hard-pressed to gain commissions for two soldiers. Therefore, after grammar school Smollett entered Glasgow University to study medicine. Anderson summed up his education there as such:

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<sup>42</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Letters of Tobias Smollett*, ed. Lewis M. Knapp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 102.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *Prefatory Memoir of the Life and Writings of Smollett* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1835), 12.

<sup>45</sup> Chambers, “Tobias Smollett,” 523.

he understood Greek very well, was pretty far advanced in mathematics, and no stranger to moral and natural philosophy: Logic, he made no account of; but he took much delight in the Belles Lettres and poetry, and had already produced some verses that met with a very favorable reception.<sup>46</sup>

These accomplishments seem to be verified in the usual school program at Glasgow University, as appropriate for a student of Smollett's experience and interests. It is even possible that he was instructed in Moral Philosophy by Francis Hutcheson who, according to biographer Lewis Knapp, was teaching there at the time.<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting change in the education paradigm was the shift from the theoretical to the empirical. Nicholas Hans suggested this shift occurred for both intellectual and utilitarian reasons. The decline of religious thought paved the way for a new, scientific explanation for life. Further, the useful arts, the natural sciences, and even applied agriculture began to trump the polite arts as the most esteemed and sought after courses. Universities expanded their curriculums accordingly. And nowhere was this more apparent than in Scotland. Scottish universities produced significantly more skilled professional men than England, from engineers to medical men.

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<sup>46</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, xv. [This caption was interpreted by Anderson as an autobiographical detail stemming from Roderick Random. It has generally been considered, by Lewis Knapp among others, to be an accurate representation of Smollett's school days. (Knapp, *Tobias Smollett, Doctor of Men and Manners*, 15.)]

<sup>47</sup> Lewis M. Knapp, *Tobias Smollett: Doctor of Men and Manners* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 17.

In medicine, especially, Scotland held the upper hand. From the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, England produced five hundred physicians, compared with the ten thousand that came from the Scottish universities.<sup>48</sup>

Medical practice at the time was divided between physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries. In England the distinctions between these disciplines was much more marked than elsewhere. Physicians were the most genteel of the three, studying natural philosophy and theory at Oxford and Cambridge, the bastions of classical thought. Their practice was predominantly academic, and involved little physical contact with patients, relying instead on observation. Surgeons were equated more with manual laborers and barbers, as they completed the unpleasantly physical tasks of the job—Random’s mentor, Crab, asks him if he can “bleed and give a clyster, spread a plaster, and prepare a potion?”<sup>49</sup> Surgery was not commonly perceived as a gentleman’s career in the early eighteenth century.

But the field experienced a marked movement toward professionalization in the following decades—the Royal College of Surgeons was established in 1745—due in part to Scottish “knights of

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<sup>48</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 123.

<sup>49</sup> Smollett, *Random*, 48. [Clyster, s. an injection into the anus (from Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary, 1828)]

the knife” like the Monroe family and John Bell.<sup>50</sup> Further, an increasingly comfortable population heightened the demand for medical treatment and, by extension, medical men. The role of physician and surgeon became increasingly intertwined and standardized. The third branch of medicine, the apothecary, relied primarily on apprenticeship rather than formal schooling. They worked in tandem with physicians and surgeons to provide remedies for common ailments.

In Scotland, these three branches of medicine melded together with far more frequency than in England. Universities in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Glasgow worked closely with local botanical gardens and practitioners to provide their students with theoretical *and* practicable knowledge. Considering that Edinburgh alone produced roughly three hundred apprentices every year,<sup>51</sup> Smollett was far from alone when he set out to pursue his medical studies.

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<sup>50</sup> Smeaton, *Smollett*, 24. [The Monroe family were the “grandfather, father, and son, who consecutively held the chair of Anatomy in Edinburgh University for one hundred and twenty-six years, namely, from 1720 to 1846.” (Smeaton, 24); John Bell (1763–1820) was an Edinburgh-based surgeon, lecturer, and author who stressed first-hand experience and hands-on training for surgeons and physicians. (Oxford DNB, John Bell)]

<sup>51</sup> Anita Guerrini, “Scots in London Medicine in the Early Eighteenth Century,” *Scots in London in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Stana Nenadic (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010), 174.

## Apprentice

During his time at Glasgow Smollett was apprenticed to John Gordon, “doctor, apothecary, and very worthy man,”<sup>52</sup> and his partner William Stirling. Beyond his medical practice, Gordon also gave lectures at the university, which provided Smollett and his fellow students with an up-close view of the experimental medicine and science for which Glasgow was gaining a reputation. Besides Smollett, John Gordon counted among his apprentices several other illustrious Scottish medical men. John Moore, “neurologist of the Scottish contingent,” gained renown for his account of the nervous system in his *Medical Sketches*.<sup>53</sup> William Smellie, who would remain friends with Smollett throughout their lives in London, was a well-known and respected male midwife. The friendships Smollett forged with these men and others would be crucial to his future success in London. Indeed, one of the reasons Scots were so successful once they arrived in the capital was because they held these ties of kinship in such high regard.

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<sup>52</sup> Chambers, “Tobias Smollett,” 524.

<sup>53</sup> Donald Bruce, *Radical Dr. Smollett* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 29.

Medical apprenticeships usually lasted for five years, followed by three years of “travelling and studie [sic],” then exams,<sup>54</sup> though many, like Smollett, headed for London before completing their apprenticeships. The Union of 1707 had flung wide the gates south, and “in no place were the changes felt so quickly as in Glasgow.”<sup>55</sup> Though Scottish culture and economy were developing at an increasingly rapid pace, Scottish towns lacked the opportunity many budding professionals saw in the southern metropolis. The Lowlands especially were swept up in England’s “dramatic commercial expansion,”<sup>56</sup> and Scots focused their business southward rather than to the east or west. This included the nobility and the merchants as well as the gentry, whose young men made their way to England in ever-larger numbers. These ambitious young men “constituted the largest group of migrants to London at this time.”<sup>57</sup> They were predominantly urban, literate, and from the middling classes, ambitious and well-connected to kinsmen and countrymen who came

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<sup>54</sup> Guerrini, “*Scots in London Medicine*,” 174.

<sup>55</sup> George M. Kahrl, *Tobias Smollett: Traveler–Novelist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 2.

<sup>56</sup> Frank O’Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History, 1688–1832* (New York: Arnold, 1997), 99.

<sup>57</sup> Guerrini, “*Scots in London Medicine*,” 175.



south before them. For them, London was “a route to empire that shaped both personal fortunes and cultural identity.”<sup>58</sup>

And for England they provided a constant stream of able and willing workers. As the Scotsman Lismahago pointed out in *Humphrey Clinker*, “to a nation in such circumstances [as England and its growing empire], a supply of industrious people is a supply of wealth.”<sup>59</sup> The exact numbers of those who moved to London are impossible to determine, owing to the lack of formal records and the fluidity with which they traveled back and forth. But the Scottish population in London was considerable by the time Smollett, as Smeaton so romantically put it, “turned his face Londonwards—one more tiny unit to be sucked down for a time into the moiling, whirling, indistinguishable crowd revolving in the vortex of the mighty social maelstrom.”<sup>60</sup>

### Naval Surgeon

In October of 1739, months before Smollett left Scotland, war was declared with Spain. It was to be known as the War of Jenkins’ Ear, after an unfortunate British captain whose ship had been forcibly

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<sup>58</sup> Nenadic, *Scots in London*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker*, 278.

<sup>60</sup> Smeaton, *Smollett*, 34.

boarded by the Spanish a few years before, and whose severed appendage had made quite an impact in Parliament. With the declaration of war came the demand for men to fill the ships of the British Navy. The year prior, Sir James Smollett, the guardian of the Smollett family, passed away. Having been left out of the will, Smollett set out with “more letters of recommendation than money in his pockets,”<sup>61</sup> and sought opportunity in London. Opportunity presented itself to him the form of the British Navy, and he soon applied at the Naval Office, obtaining a warrant as a surgeon’s second mate. Not long after, he boarded the *Chichester*, an eighty-gun ship, “one of the largest men-of-war afloat.”<sup>62</sup>

Scottish surgeons in particular were well-suited to the demands of seafaring life. Their training in Glasgow and Edinburgh concentrated heavily on the physical aspects of medicine, natural sciences, anatomy, and botany, whereas the English Oxbridge training was traditionally more highly theoretical. Scottish surgeons were characterized by a “distinctly entrepreneurial and empirical style of medical practice,”<sup>63</sup> which suited them to the varied, hands-on tasks of a naval surgeon. It is for this reason, and because Glasgow and

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<sup>61</sup> Knapp, *Smollett*, 27.

<sup>62</sup> Knapp, *Smollett*, 30.

<sup>63</sup> Guerrini, “Scots in London Medicine,” 166.

Aberdeen produced such a multitude of practitioners, that Scottish surgeons “dominated military medicine in the early eighteenth century.”<sup>64</sup> In *Roderick Random*, Smollett points out this predominance of Scotsman in the Navy. During his interview at the Surgeon’s Hall Random states his place of birth. “In Scotland,” responds the interviewer, “I know that very well; we have scarce any other countrymen to examine here; you Scotchmen have overspread us of late as the locusts did Egypt.”<sup>65</sup>

Smollett’s account of his experiences on board the *Chichester* serve to illustrate in vivid—even lurid—detail how harsh conditions were both in battle and at sea. His experiences inspired those of Roderick Random, who describes the terrible state of medical care on board the ships:

I was much less surprised that people should die on board than that any sick person should recover. Here I saw about fifty miserable distempered wretches...deprived of the light of day, as well as of fresh air; breathing nothing but a noisome atmosphere of the morbid steams exhaling from their own excrements and diseased bodies...destitute of every convenience necessary for people in that helpless position.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Guerrini, “Scots in London Medicine,” 174.

<sup>65</sup> Smollett, *Roderick Random*, 108.

<sup>66</sup> Smollett, *Roderick Random*, 174.

Smollett's ship was under the command of Admiral Edward Vernon during the ill-fated Battle of Carthagen.<sup>67</sup> Even at his young age Smollett was vocal in his outrage at the handling of the confrontation, the deplorable conditions on board, and the senseless pride of Vernon and General Wentworth. He marked, "between the pride of one and the insolence of another, the enterprise miscarried, according to the proverb, 'Between two stools, the backside falls to the ground.'"<sup>68</sup> Throughout the disastrous campaign, Smollett and the other vastly outnumbered surgeons tried to combat the effects of illness on those onboard. It is no wonder that Smollett's vivid account of Carthagen was to have such a profound effect. In fact, some credit him with spurring the movement for reform that swept through the Navy soon thereafter.

The War of Jenkin's Ear was soon subsumed by the War of the Austrian Succession, and subsequent victories served to fuel British patriotism for those on board and at home. It, along with the War of the Spanish Succession (1701 to 1714), and the Seven Years' War (roughly 1754 to 1763), "brought enough victories in their train to

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<sup>67</sup> The Battle of Carthagen was fought on the coast of present-day Colombia in 1741. The Spanish fortifications proved too strong, the English suffered heavy losses due to the unfamiliar climate and to illness, and the campaign is generally considered a fiasco.

<sup>68</sup> Smollett, *Random*, 213.

flatter British pride,”<sup>69</sup> and to strengthen the British union by reinforcing that their nation was superior to the continental Other. The British Navy represented the kingdom’s potential for empire and power. After all, the British nation was “an invention forged above all by war.”<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the British Navy was just that, British. The military was “a melting pot for the peoples of Britain.”<sup>71</sup> Within its ranks Scotsmen, Irishmen, Welshmen, and Englishmen fought alongside one another to expand their holdings and prove their status as the Chosen Land against what they saw as the absolutist, backward, and inferior Continent.

Furthermore, Britain was brilliant at sea. By 1713 it was the greatest naval power in Europe.<sup>72</sup> And aside from their successful military operations, by the middle of the eighteenth century Britain was at the helm of a formidable and growing empire. Smollett’s service in the Navy, while it jaded him against the potential for misused power, must have instilled in him some feelings of national sympathy. The sacrifices made by the men who served in the British service would have resonated even more strongly with him considering the

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<sup>69</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 5.

<sup>71</sup> O’Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century*, 97.

<sup>72</sup> O’Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century*, 38.

death of his brother James, and army captain who drowned off the coast of America. He sympathizes with friend John Home, and confesses, "I once sustained the same Calamity, in the Death of a Brother whom I loved and honoured."<sup>73</sup> Having desired a naval career from a young age, having lost a brother to its service, and having experienced the horrors of life on board, Smollett's naval experiences would affect his writing and his outlook throughout his life. These experiences represent deep personal experiences for Smollett, but they also signify the promise of Britain's seaward aspirations.

### **Traveler**

During his travels with the Navy, Smollett spent time in Jamaica and the surrounding islands. Around 1743 Smollett "wooed and won"<sup>74</sup> Anne Lasselles, "a young lady well known and universally respected,"<sup>75</sup> and a plantation heiress living with her mother in Kingston. He stated to a friend in 1744, "to tell you an extraordinary truth, I do not know, as yet, whether you had better congratulate or condole with me."<sup>76</sup> The match was potentially lucrative, but the

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<sup>73</sup> *Letters*, 38.

<sup>74</sup> Smeaton, *Smollett*, 43.

<sup>75</sup> *Letters*, 112.

<sup>76</sup> *Letters*, 2.

inheritance was tied up in the workings of the plantations. The rest depended upon Lasselles's mother, who was, as Smollett's letters show, not entirely reliable. In a 1752 letter Smollett confided, "after having so lately given me two hundred pounds...she would be alarmed & frightened almost out of her Senses, at a fresh Demand...she might in the Disposal of her Effects, take measure to cut off all my Expectations."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, Anne's inheritance came at a trickle at best, leaving Smollett with a string of lawsuits from the island and a pressing need for another source of income.

Not much is known about Anne Lassells. In *Travels Through France and Italy* Smollett describes her as "a delicate creature, who had scarce ever walked a mile in her life."<sup>78</sup> In a mid-Victorian biography Robert Chambers claimed Anne "was a Creole, with a dark complexion, though, upon the whole, rather pretty—a fine lady, but a silly woman."<sup>79</sup> Despite Smollett's reticence to talk about her in his letters, and despite their financial woes, their marriage appears to have been a happy one. In 1760 the *British Magazine* published a poem Smollett had written, presumably for his wife, titled *A*

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<sup>77</sup> *Letters*, 12.

<sup>78</sup> Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, 266.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Chambers, *Traditions of Edinburgh Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: W & C Tait, 1825), 275.

*Declaration in Love. Ode to Blu-Ey'd Ann.* In it Smollett praises, “When heav’nly bodies cease to move,/My blu-ey’d Ann I’ll cease to love.”<sup>80</sup> Likewise, in a rare letter written by Mrs. Smollett in 1773, she exclaims, “it galls me to the soul how that poor Dear Man suffered while he wrote.”<sup>81</sup> Her concern for her husband and his legacy, even after nearly thirty years of marriage, seems indicative of, if not a happy one, at least a contented marriage.

It is believed Smollett left the Navy around 1742, yet he would continue his travels as a civilian. Aside from the Caribbean, Smollett spent some time on the Continent. Though not many details are known of his early travels to mainland Europe, we know that he settled in London “after having Improved myself by travelling, in France and other countries.”<sup>82</sup> During these travels Smollett presumably saw all the classical sites, practiced his languages, made connections, and perhaps gained inspiration for the translations of *Gil Blas* and *Don Quixote* that he would later on complete.

In the eighteenth century, the Grand Tour was the capstone of a learned British man’s education. According to biographer George

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<sup>80</sup> Robert Gassman, *Poems, Plays, and The Briton* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 52.

<sup>81</sup> Taken from Lewis M. Knapp, “Ann Smollett, Wife of Tobias Smollett,” *PMLA* (Vol. 45, 4, Dec 1930), 1041.

<sup>82</sup> *Letters*, 80.



Kahrl, “there was no institution of social culture so firmly established, no form of foreign travel so popular, as the Grand Tour.”<sup>83</sup> The traditional Grand Tour consisted of visits to Paris, Florence, Rome, Naples, and sometimes a return trip through the Low Countries, in order to view the architecture and artwork of antiquity. The Grand Tour also reflected changing notions of national identity. While the numbers fluctuated throughout the century in response to the many wars that plagued England and the Continent, British travel experienced “a major increase on that of the previous century.”<sup>84</sup> The nation’s burgeoning position as a world power, especially in the wake of the century’s many wars, gave the British the status and entitlement to travel as they would.

And the British usually chose to travel as, well, Britons. Travelogues, letters, and novels from British travelers on the continent overwhelmingly attest to the belief that theirs was the chosen country, “peculiarly free and peculiarly prosperous”<sup>85</sup> compared to its continental neighbors. In other words, travel to the continent reinforced that glue that bound the disparate parts of Britain

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<sup>83</sup> George M. Kahrl, *Tobias Smollett: Traveler-Novelist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 36.

<sup>84</sup> Jeremy Black, *The British and the Grand Tour* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 1.

<sup>85</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 32.

together—their awareness of the strange, somehow threatening inhabitants beyond its borders. For this reason the “British yardstick” was wielded by Englishmen and Scotsmen alike. Smollett used his own observations extensively in his later writing career, and as Kahrl conjectured, most of his commentary on France and its inhabitants are “little more than the usual outbursts of British prejudice on liberty, patriotism, valor, or honor common to his contemporaries.”<sup>86</sup>

Smollett saw on ship and in the Caribbean Britain’s potential for military and imperial power. On the Continent he witnessed the hazards of a society lived outside the bounds of Britishness—idleness, idolatry, absolutism, and general misery stood opposed to everything Smollett’s Britain would come to define. After a university education, a medical apprenticeship, and a stint in the Navy, Smollett returned to England positioned to enter life as a truly British man of letters. In 1748 he returned to London to establish a home, await the arrival of his young Jamaican wife, and try his hand in the medical field.

### **Doctor**

Scottish medical men had been trickling steadily Londonward in increasing numbers over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. With the Union of the Crowns in 1603 Scots began to follow their

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<sup>86</sup> Kahrl, *Smollett*, 39.

patrons to the southern metropolis. Men like John Hutton, Physician General to William and Mary's army, and David Hamilton, male midwife extraordinaire and confidante of Queen Anne, provided much-needed support for their newly arrived compatriots. This support was in demand as the 1707 union "prompted additional medical men to follow their patrons to London."<sup>87</sup>

By the time Smollett arrived he was sufficiently situated, through family and university acquaintances, to gain relatively easy access to "a well-established circle of Scottish medical men in London."<sup>88</sup> These men operated on a complex system of patronage, camaraderie, and mutual support. They made names for themselves by working—remarkably efficiently—toward advancing the public good. The same skills that made Scotsmen so capable in the military prepared them for the task of running the hospitals that were opening all across London. The century saw a great philanthropic movement that resulted in the "foundation of many of the great London hospitals."<sup>89</sup> Scottish physicians and surgeons were key to the opening and running of these establishments, which increasingly catered to the diverse needs of the growing urban population. Others, like Smollett's

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<sup>87</sup> Guerrini, "Scots in London Medicine," 166.

<sup>88</sup> Guerrini, "Scots in London Medicine," 181.

<sup>89</sup> O'Gorman, *Long Eighteenth Century*, 337.

friend from his apprenticeship days, William Smellie, followed “those well worn paths for Scotsmen: the military, male midwifery, and lecturing.”<sup>90</sup> The eighteenth century saw a movement toward the democratization of education, and public lectures were one of the movement’s more visible manifestations. Scottish lecturers were especially popular in the physical sciences, and lectures by men like Smellie and Bell gathered large audiences and eventual publications.

Like many of his countrymen, Smollett received his credentials as Medical Doctor from the University of Aberdeen in 1750. He paid £28 for the degree,<sup>91</sup> which bestowed upon him the right to call himself Doctor Smollett. This practice was common among Scottish surgeons, as the degree expanded their practices and their reputations. The difficulty of entering the Royal College of Physicians gave them no other recourse than to buy the title. Yet despite the alternative means by which they made their careers, Scots had a huge and lasting impact on the practice of medicine. Just as Scottish architects and engineers were, quite literally, recreating the landscape of the new nation, and just as Scottish men of letters would soon spur a British Enlightenment that rivaled any on the continent, Scottish doctors were advancing and improving the nation’s resources to health care.

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<sup>90</sup> Guerrini, “Scots in London Medicine,” 180.

<sup>91</sup> Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Tobias Smollett.

Scottish doctors met in coffeehouses, societies, and “punch clubs,” special gatherings with hours suited to the hectic schedules of the medical practice. They created learned societies, gave lectures, presented papers, and debated new ideas. While these clubs were seemingly insular and clannish, in reality they mingled quite openly with their English counterparts. Smollett himself sat “on the fringes of these medical clubs.”<sup>92</sup> Through his work he was “acquainted with the most prominent of the Scottish doctors,” at a time when the Scots were the most prominent in the medical field.<sup>93</sup> These men, like William Smellie, William Hunter, and John Armstrong, who in 1736 published a strange sex manual entitled the *Economy of Love*, “in which sniggers and high seriousness, exhortation and bawdry are jumbled together,”<sup>94</sup> were all working to advance the medical field, and the reputation of its Scottish members.

The Scottish professionals who made their careers in London were effectively at the frontlines of the British identity. As Colley stated, “far from succumbing helplessly to an alien identity imposed by others, in moving south they helped construct what being British was

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<sup>92</sup> Nenadic, *Scots in London*, 28.

<sup>93</sup> Bruce, *Radical Dr. Smollett*, 22.

<sup>94</sup> Bruce, *Radical Dr. Smollett*, 27.

all about.”<sup>95</sup> As it always had been, London was a melting pot where people from across Great Britain came to try their hands, make connections, and reach beyond their nation to the rest of the world. Scotch emigrants proved themselves industrious, ambitious, and—far from a burden—an asset to the growing empire. By, in effect, seeing and being seen, these men quashed past notions of north Britons and learned to deal with the English on their own terms. By “learning how to be Scottish in London, British in Edinburgh, and a sort of English gentleman everywhere else”<sup>96</sup> they helped to forge a new identity for the British nation.

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By 1748 Tobias Smollett was settled in London, with a wife and a daughter, Elizabeth, on the way. He had established a medical practice for himself and, though he would forsake it for a literary career, it garnered him a livelihood and a circle of close-knit countrymen. As the descendent of a long line of landed, Presbyterian, lowland Scots, the grandson of a signatory of the Acts of Union, the student of some of Scotland’s greatest thinkers, a surgeon in the British Navy, the husband of a Jamaican heiress, and a promising London physician, Smollett was poised to embrace a successful career

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<sup>95</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 125.

<sup>96</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 42.

as a Briton in the south. Following the tried and true path of so many of his compatriots, Smollett embraced the potential that union with England promised and made a life for himself as a British man of letters.

## Chapter 3

### PUBLISHING BRITAIN: SMOLLETT AND THE LONDON LITERARY SCENE

*One of the peculiarities which distinguish  
the present age is the multiplication of the book.*  
—SAMUEL JOHNSON, *TATLER*, 1759

Examining Tobias Smollett's publishing career offers a fascinating lens through which to view his experience of the British identity. The importance of the literary establishment in the development of British culture cannot be overstated. Throughout the eighteenth century Britain's "very nature was transformed."<sup>97</sup> Britain underwent an identity crisis due to structural changes in its economy, culture, and population, its increasing international influence as a burgeoning empire, and the influence of enlightenment ideals of individuality. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson theorizes that by the eighteenth century, the decline of past societal structures like religion had paved the way for a new definition of identity. National sentiment seemed ably situated to replace these disintegrating bonds. And one of the principal influences on the spread of national identity was literature. As Anderson stated, "nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than

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<sup>97</sup> David Allan, *Making British Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 9.



print capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate to others, in profoundly new ways.”<sup>98</sup>

With its increasingly urban citizenry—one fifth of the population by 1750—and its financially comfortable middling classes, Great Britain seemed especially situated to embrace this print-laden change. The increase of distribution networks caused by advances in the road systems and the expansion of travel by sea to various parts of the kingdom meant that for the first time people in all parts of Great Britain were exposed to the same ideas and debates. Citizens across Scotland and England had access to “the cheap printed matter that flooded from Britain’s abundant printing presses.”<sup>99</sup> A national language was emerging.

Article IV of the *Articles of Union*, made official in 1707, ensured “full Freedom and Intercourse of Trade and Navigation”<sup>100</sup> throughout

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<sup>98</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006), 36.

<sup>99</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 20.

<sup>100</sup> *Articles of Union*, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006), 36.

<sup>100</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 20.

the kingdom, paving the road south for thousands of Scottish men. While the *Articles* cemented the bond between Scotland and England politically and economically, differences between Britain and the continent created tighter bonds socially and culturally, providing the British with a solid definition of what they were not. The British felt themselves superior to their continental neighbors economically, as “proportionately fewer of them starved.”<sup>101</sup> Britain also felt itself free of the confining bonds of Catholicism, which, as everyone knew, resulted in absolutist monarchs and indolent working classes. Militarily, Britain had begun to show its strengths, seemingly winning every war it fought. The British bandwagon was, thus, quite an attractive enterprise. Linda Colley perhaps summed up the Scottish desire to embrace the British identity, claiming it served to:

convince many within its boundaries that it offered ways for them to get ahead, whether in terms of commercial opportunity, or enhanced religious security and constitutional freedoms, or greater domestic stability and safety from invasion, or access to improved job opportunities at home or abroad, or less tangible forms of benefit.<sup>102</sup>

So while Smollett and many of his countrymen set out for London in the middle of the eighteenth century, fully prepared to

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<sup>100</sup> *Articles of Union*, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Colley, *Britons*, xv.

embrace and reap the benefits of a new British identity, the words they wrote and the communities they forged once there contributed to the solidification of the very identity they sought. As a Scotsman who moved to London in the middle of the century, and subsequently held a twenty-five year literary career as playwright, poet, novelist, editor, and travel writer, all in the context of a nation whose identity was in mid-flux, Smollett's career is aptly situated to examine the process by which two disparate countries became "a heterogeneous Britain united by the pen."<sup>103</sup>

### **Scotsman**

Though Smollett made his name in London, his literary career had its foundations in his homeland. Smollett's early interest in the written word is perhaps no surprise, as Scotland was thriving under a Scottish enlightenment that mirrored a wider movement on the continent. Much has been written recently regarding this enlightenment. Some, like Sher, insist it was a movement separated from the English enlightenment—in fact he contests that such a thing even existed. He claims there were "powerful and distinct national traditions, patterns of thought and social bonds among the Scottish

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<sup>103</sup> Leith Davis, *Acts of Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 24.

literati” that differed distinctly from the English literary culture.<sup>104</sup> David Allan contends that the Scots, “who understood this only too well for themselves, had recently assumed a position of extraordinary cultural and intellectual authority.”<sup>105</sup> Some, like Roy Porter, support a British enlightenment with a southern focus, as “practically all enlightened thinking was then actually coming out of English heads.”<sup>106</sup> But the consensus seems to be that in the eighteenth century there occurred a rather remarkable emergence of Scottish men of letters in fields from philosophy to medicine to literature, who made an impact on the literary world disproportionate to their size as a nation. In London’s *St. James’s Chronicle*, the Irishman Thomas Sheridan is quoted as saying “while Britain is to be the Greece of Europe, Scotland is to be the Athens of Britain.”<sup>107</sup> Sher offers a sufficiently vague definition of the Scottish Enlightenment as the:

Scottish manifestation of the international movement dedicated to the proliferation of polite, morally and intellectually edifying literature and learning...a cultural and intellectual phenomenon not reducible to any single branch, school, or mode of thought...written by individuals who associated with each other, socially and professionally...and moved easily as authors from

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<sup>104</sup> Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 21.

<sup>105</sup> Allan, *Making British Culture*, 3.

<sup>106</sup> Porter, *Creation*, xix.

<sup>107</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 67.

one genre to another. This sense of social, intellectual, and cultural integration and cohesiveness gives a distinctive character to the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>108</sup>

The Scottish Enlightenment was based in Edinburgh. By 1760 the Scottish capital was in its own right “one of the world’s great centers of print.”<sup>109</sup> The Scottish publishing industry had its roots in a tradition of English reprints and provincial publications, which were sold throughout Scotland and usually the provinces of northern England. But throughout the century, due to increased cooperation with the London establishment, the industry expanded to the production of new and influential works—by predominantly Scottish writers, but with a much larger appeal. By the 1720s Edinburgh already supported roughly forty printers and about fifty booksellers and binders,<sup>110</sup> and those numbers continued to grow substantially throughout the century.

Edinburgh was overwhelmingly the locale of choice for Scottish Enlightenment writers as it was “large and diverse enough to sustain an urban Enlightenment...without the inconvenience and expense that

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<sup>108</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 20.

<sup>109</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 40.

<sup>110</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 306.

was associated with life in London.”<sup>111</sup> Edinburgh was also known for the accessibility and welcoming atmosphere of its learned societies and associations. As it was a small town geographically, the literati were more readily visible here than in the massive metropolis of London. This high concentration of men of learning is perhaps what led Smollett to term Edinburgh a “hotbed of genius.”<sup>112</sup> William Smellie once observed “Here stand I at what is called the Cross of Edinburgh...and can in a few minutes take fifty men of genius and learning by the hand.”<sup>113</sup> The geographically small nature of the Edinburgh establishment, and the close ties that bound these men, caused some to consider the Scottish Enlightenment as merely “a backslapping coterie of Edinburgh friends.”<sup>114</sup> Yet the ties they forged with their London counterparts ensured that the reputation and influence for the enlightenment spread far beyond the borders of Scotland.

Despite Edinburgh’s thriving intellectual atmosphere, London remained “the undisputed capital of the English-language book

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<sup>111</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 110.

<sup>112</sup> Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker*, 233.

<sup>113</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 110.

<sup>114</sup> Allan, *Making British Culture*, 6.

trade.”<sup>115</sup> London’s superior resources, its firm monopoly on booksellers, and its larger potential for patronage and connections explain why “many of the most enduring new works now emerging from Scottish sources...appeared not from the Edinburgh printers but from London’s market-dominating publishing booksellers.”<sup>116</sup> So while Edinburgh was the heart and soul of the Enlightenment, Scots made their way south because, simply, London held greater commercial promise.

This constant immigration caused a powerful London-Edinburgh axis to form throughout the century; it centered around five Scottish publishers: Alexander Kincaid, Andrew Millar, Gavin Hamilton, William Strahan, and John Balfour. All five men, who were born in Scotland around 1710, attended school together, apprenticed together, and ultimately worked together to form “the seminal generation of Scottish Enlightenment publishing.”<sup>117</sup> Andrew Millar came to London in the 1720s and quickly became the most influential bookseller in Great Britain. His printer, William Strahan, followed him soon after and together they dominated the Scottish—and much of the English—literary market in the metropolis. The publishing partnership of

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<sup>115</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 8.

<sup>116</sup> Allan, *Making British Culture*, 10.

<sup>117</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 274.

Hamilton & Balfour, and the bookseller Kincaid, expanded the printing industry in Edinburgh in collaboration with their London compatriots.

Smollett had close ties to this publishing axis. Millar and Strahan published his work. He corresponded with Carlyle, Hume, and Home. He entertained countless young writers in need of patronage and support, and wrote constantly to friends recommending countless others. Along with the works of Hume, Smith, Beattie, Buchan, and others, his works became part of an almost instant eighteenth century literary canon.<sup>118</sup> The London-Edinburgh publishing axis was an essentially “symbiotic” relationship—“Scottish authors...provided British publishers with their most prestigious and potentially lucrative raw material for books, while publishers provided Scottish authors...with opportunities for international fame, glory, and wealth.”<sup>119</sup>

While the Scots were merely one of many populations transplanted to the metropolis—there were substantially more Irish, for instance—they distinguished themselves by their tenacity, their sophistication, and their professional abilities. Their desire to assimilate and their comparative urbanity meant that “Scots were

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<sup>118</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 32.

<sup>119</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 11.



distinctive, but not to such a degree, and certainly with such negative connotations, as some other migrant groups.”<sup>120</sup> In fact the Scottish professionals who came to London were overwhelmingly successful, much to the chagrin and (grudging) admiration of the English. The success of these men was remarkable. North Britons advanced themselves so well that a Scottish accent—carefully tamed, of course—could even work as an advantage, especially among the medical and clerical professions. Smollett himself commented on this phenomenon in his novel, *Humphrey Clinker*, when he remarked that “it is now received as an eternal truth, even among the English themselves, that the Scots who settle in South Britain are remarkably sober, orderly, and industrious.”<sup>121</sup>

Scots in London took great pains to assimilate to their new environment, for while a Scottish accent could be advantageous to a clergyman or a physician, the Scottish burr possessed—even among the Scots themselves—connotations of provinciality or a lack of learning. Some, like David Hume (Home) and William Strachan (Strahan), anglicized their names. Others utilized guidebooks and peer review to remedy their speech and writing. Smollett himself was careful in his writing, so as not to alienate readers with glaring or

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<sup>120</sup> Nenadic, *Scots*, 20.

<sup>121</sup> Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker*, 278.

unfamiliar terms. Financial success and reputation hung on a writer's ability to assimilate. And it is remarkable that the Scots did this so well. Ultimately, in accepting the British identity, with all of its potential advantages, "Scottish people [could] best be served by no longer being Scots."<sup>122</sup> Through their successful integration into English society, Scots in London helped to create a cosmopolitan, national identity. And likewise, "contact with London helped to shape a Scottish identity that was based on an emerging formulation of Britishness."<sup>123</sup>

### **Playwright**

Tobias Smollett arrived in London in early 1744 after roughly four years of life on ship as a naval surgeon. Sailing from Jamaica, he had left his new wife, plantation heiress Anne Lassells, until he could establish himself in the thriving metropolis. "You may henceforth direct for Mr. Smollett, surgeon, in Downing Street,"<sup>124</sup> he wrote to a Glaswegian friend in that year. Smollett had indeed come to London with the intention of setting up a medical practice. But amid his

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<sup>122</sup> Davis, *Acts of Union*, 25.

<sup>123</sup> Nenadic, *Scots*, 31.

<sup>124</sup> Tobias Smollett, *Letters of Tobias Smollett* ed. Lewis Knapp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 1.

belongings he also carried *The Regicide*.<sup>125</sup> He hoped to see the play, a tragic examination of the assassination of James I of Scotland, performed in Covent Garden before too long. It must have appeared to Smollett that “the quickest entry to the world of renown seemed to be the theater.”<sup>126</sup> One wonders if Smollett, would-be playwright though he was, had any intention of jumping so whole-heartedly into London’s thriving literary metropolis when he first set up house in Westminster. Bryan Gassman suggests he sought cultural refinement, recognition, and success, “a hope carried by many young men drawn from their native cities into the metropolis by the vitality of London life.”<sup>127</sup>

The weight and influence of the British capital at this time cannot be overstated. “By some distance Europe’s largest city,”<sup>128</sup> with a population of almost one million by 1800, London was the cultural, commercial, and political capital of the nation. Citizens from across the island flocked to that promise land and London had room for all of them. It was the “economic heartbeat and political master of an expanding and self-confidently imperial nation,” and, more

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<sup>125</sup> Robert Anderson, *The Life of Tobias Smollett, MD* (London: J Mundell & Co., 1796), 2.

<sup>126</sup> Byron Gassman, *Poems, Plays, and The Briton* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 69.

<sup>127</sup> Gassman, *Poems*, 3.

<sup>128</sup> Allan, *Making British Culture*, 9.

importantly for Smollett, it was “home to the leading men of letters, to the burgeoning newspaper industry and to the British print culture.”<sup>129</sup>

It appears that soon after his arrival he all but gave up the medical career and “betook himself to his pen for subsistence.”<sup>130</sup> The transition from medical man to man of letters was not as unlikely as it may sound. Richard Sher points out that many Scottish medical men “who failed to make satisfactory careers for themselves became hired pens in London.”<sup>131</sup> This is because by the 1740s book business was big business in London. The opening of the trade with the expiration of the Printing Act in 1695 cleared the way for unprecedented growth in the industry. The small, disparate printing endeavors of previous centuries were being consolidated into larger houses, sometimes with forty or fifty employees; these houses were large enough to churn out editions of 10,000 books with surprising frequency.<sup>132</sup> Whereas previously a copyright holder could act as publisher, printer, and distributor, these roles became increasingly delineated. This century saw the “emergence of the publisher as the dominant figure in the trade of printed

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<sup>129</sup> Allan, *Making British Culture*, 10.

<sup>130</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

<sup>131</sup> Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 122.

<sup>132</sup> John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 94.

books.”<sup>133</sup> Publishers held copyrights, printers acted as their agents, and booksellers were their main customers. All these groups were conscious of their external competition, and collaborated in the “powerfully centralized, personally networked culture of London’s literary marketplace”<sup>134</sup> to maintain London’s monopoly on the industry. Meanwhile the London faction became increasingly aware of the provincial market. Attempts to reach a broader audience resulted in the proliferation of advertisements, catalogues, and reviews, as well as the development of more sophisticated systems of distribution and cooperation. Production increased to keep up with demand and by the middle of the century “Britain found itself awash in print.”<sup>135</sup>

It was in this bustling arena that Smollett earnestly peddled his literary wares. Despite his own faith in the greatness of the play—biographer Oliphant Smeaton claimed Smollett “believed almost as implicitly as in his own salvation, that *The Regicide* was not much less notable a play than any of Shakespeare’s”<sup>136</sup>—it was not well-received.

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<sup>133</sup> Feather, *History*, 83.

<sup>134</sup> Betty A. Schellenberg, “The Second Coming of the Book,” in *Producing the Eighteenth Century Book*, ed. Laura Runge & Pat Rogers (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>135</sup> Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World* (New York: WW Norton & Co, 2000), 479.

<sup>136</sup> Oliphant Smeaton, *Tobias Smollett* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1897), 30.

It was presented to James Lacy at Drury Lane and John Rich of Covent Garden, garnered the support of the aristocratic Lord Chesterfield and the actor David Garrick, but failed to reach the stage. Smollett felt his play had been unjustly overlooked, “sacrificed by the spleen of envious rivals and knavish managers.”<sup>137</sup> His wrath for the playmasters who had rejected it was apparent in his work—he devotes two chapters of *Roderick Random* to the story of Melopoyne, a brilliant playwright wrongfully ignored by an ignorant and corrupted establishment.

It is possible that the Scotocentric nature of the play was detrimental to its appeal, but then again it is possible that, as seems to be the overall consensus, the play was bad. Smeaton termed it “the immature ravings of a callow poet,”<sup>138</sup> and his friend Alexander Carlyle later wrote “the Managers could not be blamed...the public seem’d to take part with the Managers.”<sup>139</sup> In a letter to Carlyle on June 7, 1748, Smollett wrote, “despairing of seeing my old Performance represented, I have at last taken the advice of my friends, and opened a

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<sup>137</sup> Smeaton, *Smollett*, 30.

<sup>138</sup> Smeaton, *Smollett*, 30.

<sup>139</sup> Letters of Carlyle, quoted from Gassman, 73.

Subscription for publishing it.”<sup>140</sup> It was published unperformed in May the following year. Attached to the play was a scathing preface in which he relayed his entire ordeal, denouncing the whole thing as “a series of the most unjustifiable Equivocation and insolent Absurdity.”<sup>141</sup> In a characteristically Victorian encyclopedia entry of Smollett, the Scot’s theater career is summed up as such: “he failed, quarreled with everybody about it, and published it...later with a very foolish preface.”<sup>142</sup>

## Poet

Smollett’s theatrical failures aside, London was a very promising place for an up-and-coming Scottish writer. A stream of Scottish men of letters had begun to trickle to the southern capital long before the Union of 1707. A century earlier, with the Union of the Crowns, the aristocracy had travelled often between London and Scotland, followed closely by professional men. Once the Union was official, however, the number of emigrants increased dramatically. The aristocracy followed parliament permanently to London, and “this

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<sup>140</sup> *Letters*, 10.

<sup>141</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Regicide* in, *Poems, Plays, and The Briton*, ed. Bryan Gassman, 89.

<sup>142</sup> “Tobias Smollett,” *Chambers Encyclopedia* (London: W & R Chambers, 1868), 524.

relocation of much of the high-level political and patronage business...ensured that many other Scots across the social spectrum were obliged to engage in London life.”<sup>143</sup> Many Scots who left for London to make their fortune often set up there permanently. Smollett conjectured that “not one in 200 that leave Scotland ever return to settle in his own country.”<sup>144</sup>

Once in London Scottish professionals were privy to a large and largely congenial community of fellow northerners. This community was so vital to success that Stana Nenadic claimed the “Scottish diaspora [was] defined by collective possession of a form of ‘social capacity’ that allowed relatively weak individuals to gain strength through collective associative behavior based on shared values and trust.”<sup>145</sup> There were Scottish social clubs and professional organizations, charities for Scottish poor, academies for men of letters, employment agencies, and even dancing assemblies. Certain residential neighborhoods had a marked Scottish population, such as the Argyll Street district, centered around the Duke of Argyll’s estate, and the Strand, the bookselling district. St. Martins and Holborn also

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<sup>143</sup> Stana Nenadic, *Scots in London* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010), 14.

<sup>144</sup> Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker*, 278.

<sup>145</sup> Nenadic, *Scots*, 26.



had significant Scottish populations. Scots socialized, worked, and lived with their countrymen, and some never ventured out of these circles. Nenadic quotes one gentleman who stated: “I never enter into conversation with the John Bulls, for to tell you the truth, I don’t yet well understand what they say.”<sup>146</sup> The close-knit nature of the Scots suggested a “clannishness that in turn fueled the prejudices against them.”<sup>147</sup> Yet while the traditional clan system still existed, “most seemingly ‘clannish’ Scottish clubs and networks were in reality highly Anglicized” and most Scots “conducted their association life in more modern and socially positive ways.”<sup>148</sup>

Scots in London met in private homes and academic clubs, in taverns, and in coffeehouses. The coffeehouse in the eighteenth century was the cultural hub of the city, where men came after a day’s work to read the newspaper, make contacts, and catch up with colleagues. Business deals were formed here; patronage was solicited, and the political debates of the day played out over wooden tables and glasses of claret. In fact, the first official publishing trade sale, which took place in 1718 for the exchange of copyrights, was held in the Queen’s

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<sup>146</sup> Nenadic, *Scots*, 21.

<sup>147</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 128.

<sup>148</sup> Nenadic, *Scots*, 27, 29.

Head Tavern on Paternoster Row.<sup>149</sup> Roy Porter's description of the intellectual movements of the century to "the mixed clientele talking, talking, talking in a hot, smoky and crowded coffee house"<sup>150</sup> comes vividly to life in the correspondence of the Scottish writers.

One establishment in particular, the British Coffeehouse on Cockspur Street, "constituted the physical and social center of Scottish culture in London."<sup>151</sup> It was conveniently close to London's bookselling district, the Strand, and was the meeting place for many Scottish professional clubs. Smollett himself frequented the establishment regularly. It was in the British Coffeehouse, in fact, that Smollett heard the news of the stunning defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden in 1745. The English victory signaled the end of the Great Pretender's cause once and for all, and based on the riots that filled the streets all of London knew it. Smollett had been dining with his friend Alexander Carlyle when the rioting broke out. As the two men left the establishment, swords in hand, Smollett suggested they keep their accents well-hidden, warning "John Bull...is as Haughty and Valiant tonight, as a few Months ago he was abject and cowardly, on the Black

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<sup>149</sup> Feather, *History*, 72.

<sup>150</sup> Porter, *Creation*, xviii.

<sup>151</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 129.

Wednesday when the Highlanders were at Derby.”<sup>152</sup> One can imagine the Coffeehouse was an uneasy place to be that night—its reputation as a refuge in a sea of anti-Scottish sentiment could also make it a target for expression of that sentiment.

One can imagine Smollett, upon reaching his home, locking himself immediately in his study to pen his *Tears of Scotland*. Warnings from his friends that the poem “might raise him powerful enemies,” led Smollett to “avow them more openly than ever,” and he even added a final, more defiant stanza.<sup>153</sup> The poem, which begins and ends with “Mourn, hapless Caledonia, mourn/ thy banish’d peace/thy laurels torn,”<sup>154</sup> was not a eulogy for the Stuart cause—Smollett, as it has often been pointed out, “was certainly no Jacobite.”<sup>155</sup> Though he was roused by the suffering of his countrymen, his outrage at the event more to do with what he saw as “further evidence of the corruption and injustice”<sup>156</sup> that plagued the kingdom.

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<sup>152</sup> Carlyle letter, taken from Gassman, 5.

<sup>153</sup> John Moore, *The Works of Tobias Smollett, MD, with memoirs of his life* (London: B. Law & Co., 1797), cxvi.

<sup>154</sup> Tobias Smollett, *Tears of Scotland*, 1745.

<sup>155</sup> Gassman, *Poems*, 5.

<sup>156</sup> Gassman, *Poems*, 5.

The poem was hugely popular on both sides of the Tweed, and was even set to music.

*The Tears of Scotland* was Smollett's first public expression of his frustration with the moral and social flaws of British society—frustrations felt by some of his English contemporaries including Alexander Pope and even the venerable Samuel Johnson. This disillusionment, coupled with his failure to enter the literary establishment during his first few years in London, embittered Smollett perceptively. It also exacerbated his own natural inclination toward satire, which he readily wielded in two poems, *Advice*, and *Reproof*, published in 1746 and 1747. The poems were written as guides for life in the capital, and in them he “indulges his satiric vein with no small degree of freedom.”<sup>157</sup> Smollett's successful forays into poetry laid the groundwork in style and content for the rest of his prodigious literary career. They also demonstrate the early reactions of a newly transplanted Scottish immigrant in a foreign and potentially hostile London.

## **Novelist**

In a letter to Alexander Carlyle in 1747, Smollett wrote “I have finished a Romance in two small volumes, called *The Adventures of*

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<sup>157</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, 7.

Roderick Random...and by the reception it has met with in private from the best Judges here I have reason to believe it will succeed very well.”<sup>158</sup> The novel, published the following year by the London firm of John Osborne, quickly became a bestseller. Its duodecimo format would have made it affordable, and readers were captivated equally by Smollett’s wit and by his protagonist’s adventures. After years of struggling in obscurity, Smollett was thrust into the literary limelight.

*Roderick Random* is the tale of a young north Briton who seeks his fortune, first in the navy, and then in London, and ultimately integrates into British culture. That the novel is commonly seen as autobiographical is therefore no surprise, though Smollett often denied it. He once wrote “the only Similitude between the Circumstances of my own Fortune and those I have attributed to Roderick Random consists in my being born of a reputable Family in Scotland, in my being bred a Surgeon, and having served as a Surgeon’s mate on board a man of war during the Expedition to Carthagene.”<sup>159</sup> Though he may not be Smollett, some argue that Random is actually the first Scottish hero to appear in English literature, and that the novel is “an attempt to redress the bias against the Scots.”<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Smollett, *Letters*, 6-7.

<sup>159</sup> Smollett, *Letters*, 112.

<sup>160</sup> Davis, *Acts of Union*, 67.

Regardless of its supposed national bias, *Random* is commonly credited as one of the first novels published, along with Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. The novel has been touted as "the most significant new development"<sup>161</sup> in the publishing industry in that century or any other since. Pioneered by Daniel Defoe and Richard Head in the early 1700s, the novel found its modern form in the works of Fielding and Smollett. The novel answered the rising demand for the sensational and sentimental, in a format that was readily accessible. With a publishing industry able and eager to serve this new market, it is no surprise that "the novel is a product of the eighteenth century."<sup>162</sup>

Smollett and Richardson were thus counted among the first around whom the cult of the author would form. Prior to the eighteenth century, the role of the author was given little, if any, consideration. But with the mass production of books, literature was given, as Johnson termed it, "the surest route to permanence," and thus, authority.<sup>163</sup> Also apparent in this process is the professionalization of authorship. The literary realm was no longer

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<sup>161</sup> Feather, *History*, 96.

<sup>162</sup> Feather, *History*, 96.

<sup>163</sup> Schellenberg, "Making Book History," in *Producing the Eighteenth Century Book*, 37.

reserved for the gentleman scholar, but for writers who made their livings by the pen alone. The eighteenth century saw the rise of men who “wrote chiefly for money.”<sup>164</sup> In the process authors became, essentially, brand names. The practice of claiming authorship was especially embraced by the writers of the Scottish enlightenment. These Scottish writers wrote in part for recognition and personal fame. And as Sher pointed out, the desire to be associated with their works was a “self-conscious attempt to glorify and improve the Scottish nation through the publication of learned and literary books.”<sup>165</sup> Books, both novels and non-fiction, credited the authors, and in doing so, credited their movement as a whole.

Furthermore, the novel created a means by which countless readers could experience various points of view in a way that few other mediums could provide. Novels “produced citizens who felt rather than merely contemplated”<sup>166</sup> their new nationhood. Novels offered a way for readers to immerse themselves in a new viewpoint, to sympathize with otherwise foreign characters. In *Random*, English readers could feel sympathy for a Scottish protagonist. Smollett could essentially rewrite the British identity—a British hero, thriving in a British

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<sup>164</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 197.

<sup>165</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 21.

<sup>166</sup> Davis, *Acts of Union*, 73.

environment. As Anderson explained, novels “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation.”<sup>167</sup> Smollett’s later novels, including *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), and particularly *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771), also explore these ideas of identity and nationhood. That all these books were bestsellers indicates the demand there was for these new perspectives. It was thus partly through the publication and wide dissemination of novels like Smollett’s that this “community of disparate readers...became a united national body through the act of reading.”<sup>168</sup>

### **Hack Writer**

From 1748 to 1763, Tobias Smollett either wrote personally or had his hand in dozens of publications, ranging from novels to travel compendiums. It is therefore no wonder that Sher deemed him “by far the most successful of the Grub Street Scots.”<sup>169</sup> The phenomenon of the hack writer arose as a result of the seemingly endless demand for literature felt in London as the eighteenth century progressed.

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<sup>167</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.

<sup>168</sup> Davis, *Acts of Union*, 56.

<sup>169</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 123.



Smollett joined the masses of other writers, many of them Scottish, who sought their fortunes by the pen alone. In his dictionary, Samuel Johnson defines Grub Street as “the name of a street in London, much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries, and temporary poems; whence any mean production is called grubstreet.”<sup>170</sup> The plight of the Grub Street writer was perhaps best described by Smollett himself in a 1756 *Critical Review* article in which he lamented the:

infinite pains and perseverance it must cost a writer [working for booksellers] who cannot distinguish authors of merit, or if they could, have not the sense and spirit to reward them according to their genius and capacity...the miserable author must his daily task, in spite of cramp, colick, vapours, or vertigo; in spite of head-ach, heart-ach, and Minerva’s frowns; otherwise he will lose his character and livelihood”<sup>171</sup>

The scorn that gentleman writers of the eighteenth century had for these writers for hire is apparent—Alexander Pope wrote his *Dunciad* denouncing those who write for money without principles, and features attacks “leveled, against Failures in Genius, or against Pretensions of writing without one.”<sup>172</sup> Yet current thought seems to be

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<sup>170</sup> Johnson, *Dictionary*, 1766

<sup>171</sup>Tobias Smollett, *Critical Review*, 1756, 1.

<sup>172</sup> Alexander Pope, *Dunciad* (London: Printed for Lawton Gulliver, 1729), 6.

tending away from this depiction of the soulless, destitute writer. “Much nonsense has been written about Grub Street,” writes John Feather, “most of them were reasonably well paid...if they lived in garrets, they did so of choice.”<sup>173</sup> Sher even insists that the Scottish men who wrote for Grub Street publishers were not nearly so far removed from their high-brow counterparts as they might have assumed. After all, Pope himself subsisted as an author, and even Johnson engaged in “hack work.” Sher suggests “if the Scottish Grub Street writers in London stood far from the epicenter of the Scottish Enlightenment in more ways than one, their marginality should not be exaggerated.”<sup>174</sup> Sher goes on to suggest that these writers wrote about the same issues, most times with the same levels of ability and passion, as the literati. Smollett counted among other Scottish writers, like William Russell and William Smellie, who gained great literary reputations despite their hack writing careers. Smollett himself resented the implications his need for money held. His attitude earned him scorn from hack writers and others alike as, “even when forced into the circumstances of a hired writer, he refused to think of himself

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<sup>173</sup> Feather, *History*, 104.

<sup>174</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 128.

as one.”<sup>175</sup> The disillusionment and seedy literary environment of Grub Street led him to lament in a letter to Carlyle that he was “heartily tired of this Land of Indifference and Phlegm where finer Sensations of the Soul are not felt...where Genius is Lost, Learning undervalued, and Taste altogether extinguished.”<sup>176</sup>

Despite their unfortunate reputations, these men earned their keep undertaking major publications that, while sating the increasing public demand for the written word, provided an opportunity to essentially rewrite the national dialogue. A dizzying array of travelogues, compendiums, histories, translations, dictionaries, guidebooks, and almanacs flowed forth. Throughout his writing career, Smollett contributed to *A Compendium of Authentic and Entertaining Voyages* (1756), the *Modern Part of the Universal History* (1759-66), and *Present State of All Nations* (1768-9), three massive and exhaustive texts on the state of the world and its inhabitants. He contributed to these in varying degrees, editing, writing, or somewhere in between. He also completed translations of several influential continental works, including the Spanish classic *Don Quixote*, and *The Adventures of Gil Blas* and *The Adventures of Telemachus, Son of*

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<sup>175</sup> Frank Donaghue, *The Fame Machine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 132.

<sup>176</sup> Smollett, *Letters*, 33.

*Ulysses*, both wildly popular French novels. It appears that Smollett was quite skilled as a translator—biographer Anderson suggested that since a good translation “must be executed by a person possessed of a genius a-kin to the author...a better than Smollett’s, upon the whole, cannot be expected to appear in our language.”<sup>177</sup> As a testament to this, Smollett’s *Don Quixote* is still utilized today. These translations would have been important at the time in introducing continental writing styles and themes to British literature—their influence on Smollett’s own work, in the quixotic (*Sir Lancelot Greaves*) or the picaresque (*Peregrine Pickle*) is also apparent.<sup>178</sup>

Another of Smollett’s greatest successes— an alarmingly ambitious undertaking— was his publication of *A Complete History of England Deduced, from the Descent of Julius Ceaser, to the Treaty of Aix la Chappelle, 1748*. “Composed and prepared for the press, in fourteen months,”<sup>179</sup> the work was openly acknowledged by Smollett as a job undertaken for money. In a letter written in September of 1756 Smollett confessed he was “engaged to finish the History by Christmas, so that you may guess my situation. When I sat down to write this

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<sup>177</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 20.

<sup>178</sup> Donaghue, *Fame Machine*, 129.

<sup>179</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 27.

work I was harassed by duns.”<sup>180</sup> The work, “Containing the Transactions of One Thousand Eight Hundred and Three Years,” was intended, as Smollett wrote in the preface,

To retrench the superfluities of his predecessors, and to present the public with a succinct, candid, and complete history of our own country, which will be more easy in the purchase, more agreeable in the perusal, and less burdensome to the memory, than any work of the same nature, produced in these kingdoms.<sup>181</sup>

It was a popular history, “independent of favour or of faction,”<sup>182</sup> and “entirely free from all national jealousy and prejudice,”<sup>183</sup> and it narrated a distinctly British history of the Kingdom.

Many Scottish writers, such as David Hume, James Mills, and Adam Ferguson, also dabbled in history writing at the time, as it provided a unique opportunity to reaffirm Scotland’s influence in Great Britain and beyond, and to solidify the union between England and Scotland. As Karen O’Brien and Susan Manning suggested in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, these writers, “by their

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<sup>180</sup>Smollett, *Letters*, 49 [dun, s. a clamorous, troublesome creditor (Johnson’s Dictionary, 1836)].

<sup>181</sup> Smollett, *Complete History of England*, 1.

<sup>182</sup> Smollett, *Complete History*, A1.

<sup>183</sup> “A Sketch of the Plan” for the History, quoted from OM Brack, “Smollett Puffs his Histories,” *Writers, Books, and Trade*, ed. OM Brack (New York: AMS Press, 1994), 269.

readily intelligible anglicized prose and broad, comparative historical approach signaled the European intellectual leadership which Scotland could afford to Britain as a whole.”<sup>184</sup> The first three volumes of Smollett’s history were published in April, and the fourth in November, of 1756. It was sold in a quarto format—reserved for reference works and works of durative interest—for £3.3s, a much cheaper price than similar works. The *History* was featured in a massive advertising campaign; the publishers sent half a crown to “some 10,000 Anglican parishes,”<sup>185</sup> along with thousands of quarto-sized proposals to be dispensed in their church pew.

This widespread campaign illustrates perfectly the increasingly national character of the publishing industry, and its ability to reach and appeal to readers throughout the island. As Feather suggests, “the existence of a flourishing provincial book trade” was one of the most important changes in eighteenth century publishing.<sup>186</sup> By 1730 there were printers in nearly every major town in Great Britain. In conjunction with the London publishers they were able to distribute printed matter to regions that were potentially out of London’s reach.

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<sup>184</sup> Karen O’Brien and Susan Manning, *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, Vol. 2: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire (1707-1918)*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 144.

<sup>185</sup> Brack, “Histories,” in *Writers, Books, and Trade*, 267.

<sup>186</sup> Feather, *History*, 98.

While London was still the stronghold of the industry, an increasingly complex network of roads and ship routes connected it to the rest of the island, meaning that for the first time news and books—and advertisements for Smollett’s new *History*—could reach anyone from Cornwall to Aberdeen.

The massive investment paid off, and the work sold 20,000 copies by December of 1766.<sup>187</sup> It is counted “among the most popular multi-volume works published in the eighteenth century,”<sup>188</sup> and became a standard of English histories well into the 1900s. In fact, due to “the extraordinary demand for his work,”<sup>189</sup> he published A *Continuation of the Complete History of England* shortly afterward. Intentionally designed in appearance to Hume’s own hugely popular *History of England*, published in 1754, which no doubt added to its already wide appeal, it also became a bestseller. Smollett’s histories, translations, and compendiums, along with the works written by his fellow Grub Street Scots, helped to create a literary canon of work that all of Great Britain could share. With a common narrative intact, the British could begin to define and cement their new identity as a nation.

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<sup>187</sup> Brack, “Histories,” 267.

<sup>188</sup> Brack, “Histories,” 267.

<sup>189</sup>Tobias Smollett, *Continuation*, A2.

## Editor

Smollett's editorial work is perhaps one of the most telling and influential phases of his literary career. Through his work on the *British Magazine*, the *Critical Review* and the *Briton*, Smollett left an indelible mark on the literary legacy of the century. The eighteenth century saw an explosion of periodical production and influence. Newspapers were "gradually becoming principle vehicles for fact and opinion."<sup>190</sup> As Leith Davis argued in his *Acts of Union*, the Union of England and Scotland "was situated in the context of this expansion of print and the growth of the reading public."<sup>191</sup> The people of Great Britain watched with intense fascination as the Union debate was played out in Parliament. This insatiable demand for current, immediate information was met by the increasing numbers of periodicals—pamphlets, newspapers, and even broadsides—that poured forth from the presses.

Debates between writers like the pro-Union Defoe and his opponent John Hamilton, Lord Belhaven raged in the intensely public and highly scrutinized medium of the press. Greater distribution and affordability meant that people across the island could participate in the debate, all the while constantly aware that, as Anderson put it,

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<sup>190</sup> Feather, *History*, 85.

<sup>191</sup> Davis, *Acts of Union*, 21.



“the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands of others.”<sup>192</sup> The papers were read in coffeehouses and private homes throughout the country, and provided a medium for the discussion of previously unexplored ideas of identity and nationhood. Davis maintains that “the new British nation was constructed from the dialogue that took place regarding its existence”<sup>193</sup>

The popularity of the newspaper continued to expand well after the Union, of course; after all, “a nation united by reading and writing has to be constantly reread and rewritten in order to maintain its existence.”<sup>194</sup> The first daily paper, *The Daily Courant*, appeared in 1702; by 1730, there were printers in nearly every major town producing newspapers that could be spread throughout the provinces.<sup>195</sup> Just as the novel offered a way for countless individuals to explore their own ideas of identity, the newspaper, as an “‘extreme form’ of the book,”<sup>196</sup> united people on an infinitely larger scale. In an

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<sup>192</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

<sup>193</sup> Davis, *Acts of Union*, 22.

<sup>194</sup> Davis, *Acts of Union*, 45.

<sup>195</sup> Feather, *History*, 98.

<sup>196</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 34.

age in which periodicals “increasingly came to dominate the literary scene,”<sup>197</sup> it is no surprise that Smollett chose to throw his hand in.

In 1756 Smollett introduced the *Critical Review*, a monthly periodical meant to replace the current, connection-based literary market with “a setting that would mitigate against the various forces that had kept him, a young, unconnected Scot, from succeeding more easily.”<sup>198</sup> It was produced by Smollett and Scottish printer Archibald Hamilton as a monthly compendium of book reviews and publishing news. Feather suggests that in founding the *Review*, Smollett actually “pioneered book reviewing of the kind which is now familiar.”<sup>199</sup> In part a reaction to his increasing disillusionment at the hired writing he had toiled at for so long, the *Review* was also, as Smollett wrote, “a small Branch of an extensive Plan which I last year projected for some sort of Academy of the belles Lettres.”<sup>200</sup> The Academy never materialized but the *Review* did alter the way books were examined and advertised from that point forward.

As a major publication of literature written and published by Scottish literary men the publication is quite remarkable. Smollett as a

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<sup>197</sup> Donaghue, *Fame Machine*, 2.

<sup>198</sup> Donaghue, *Fame Machine*, 128.

<sup>199</sup> Feather, *History*, 100.

<sup>200</sup> Smollett, *Letters*, 46.

Scotsman was doubtless party to the literati's habit of "puffing," or touting the works of fellow writers in exchange for positive reviews of subsequent works. Therefore, as Sher explained, "publications by Scottish authors had a distinct advantage as long as Smollett was associated with that journal."<sup>201</sup> The *Critical Review* was in fact quite influential, and in as its editor Smollett rendered himself "one of the most powerful men on the London literary scene."<sup>202</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Smollett's attempt to act as "supreme judge in the republic of letters"<sup>203</sup> did not garner him many friends. In January of 1758 he wrote to John Moore "You cannot conceive the Jealousy that prevails against us. Nevertheless, it is better to be envied than despised."<sup>204</sup> And it was in his work on the *Review* that Smollett became entangled in his most public dispute. In March 1759 he was charged with libel by Admiral Charles Knowles. Knowles had "taken Exception at a Paragraph"<sup>205</sup> in an edition of the *Critical Review* regarding his service in Cartagena, and Smollett was eventually sentenced to three months in prison for the offence.

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<sup>201</sup> Sher, *Enlightenment*, 366.

<sup>202</sup> Donaghue, *Fame Machine*, 125.

<sup>203</sup> Donaghue, *Fame Machine*, 145.

<sup>204</sup> Smollett, *Letters*, 65.

<sup>205</sup> Smollett, *Letters*, 76.

Smollett would continue to oversee the *Review* until 1763, though he became increasingly tired of the “novelty of being a target” and the “hostility of the collective of authors” he critiqued.<sup>206</sup>

Throughout 1760 and 1761, *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot Greaves* was published serially in the *British Magazine*. Smollett’s story of a quixotic knight and his sidekick, Timothy Crabshaw, was the first English novel “of any literary significance” to be written for serial publication.<sup>207</sup> This was of course a major development, as it meant that the potential audience for literary works expanded greatly. Periodicals had a broader distribution and were more affordable than books. This combination of Smollett’s fiction with the miscellaneous political and social articles in the *British Magazine* was a potent combination and addition to the national dialogue, and the magazine remained popular well into the next century.

It is perhaps in his undertaking of the *Briton* that Smollett’s nationality came to the forefront of his career. In the 1760s, the promotion of the generally reviled John Stuart, Earl of Bute, George III’s longtime favorite from north of the border, had stoked London’s Scotophobia to frenzied proportions. As a result of the unpopular policies of the Earl, especially in regard to the continuing Seven Years

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<sup>206</sup> Donaghue, *Fame Machine*, 146.

<sup>207</sup> Feather, *History*, 113.

War, “jealousy took the alarm, and raised a general outcry against the administration.”<sup>208</sup> In a desperate public relations attempt, Bute and his followers called upon Smollett to quell the flames. Smollett was well-known already as a successful and prolific writer; his nationality, and his apparent sympathy to the king’s cause, made him an ideal candidate as the ministry’s mouthpiece. As a result, Smollett “was enlisted by his fellow countryman to propagandize the public in behalf of Bute’s peace policy.”<sup>209</sup> Thus was born *The Briton*. The first issue was printed in May of 1762, and in it Smollett proposed to “pluck the mask of patriotism from the front of faction, and the torch of discord from the hand of sedition.” He defended “the undoubted privilege of every Briton, to speak his mind freely,” on issues concerning the direction of the country.<sup>210</sup>

Shortly after the appearance of Smollett’s publication, John Wilkes, a member of Parliament, released the *North Briton*, “its title glancing ironically at the birthplace of both Bute and Smollett,”<sup>211</sup> meant to counter Smollett’s pro-ministry propaganda. Wilkes—formerly on friendly terms with Smollett—soon resorted to harshly

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<sup>208</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 27.

<sup>209</sup> Gassman, *Poems*, 226.

<sup>210</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Briton*, in Gassman.

<sup>211</sup> Gassman, *Poems*, 230.

satirical attacks on Bute and any who might support him; Smollett retorted in kind. Though *The Briton* only ran for eight months, and though it failed in maintaining support for Bute, the presence of both publications allowed all of Britain to participate in the debate. Perhaps most importantly, in the *Briton* Smollett presents George III as a “trueborn Briton and a patriot king,”<sup>212</sup> a king who considers his Scottish and English subjects with equal affinity. Though Wilkes’s rhetoric was harshly anti-Scottish, Smollett and his supporters called for a dialect freed from Anglo-Scottish prejudices, to discuss issues pertinent to Britain as a whole.

### **Travel Writer**

In a letter to an American writer in May, 1763, Smollett lamented, “having lost my only child, a fine Girl of Fifteen, whose Death has overwhelmed myself and my wife with unutterable Sorrow.”<sup>213</sup> Elizabeth Smollett had died the month before. His grief, coupled with decades of endless hackwork and constant criticism, rendered Smollett exhausted, ill, and depressed. “Such is the Tenderness of my nature enervated by ill Health and misfortune,” he

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<sup>212</sup> Gassman, *Poems*, 237.

<sup>213</sup> Smollett, *Letters*, 113.

wrote to a friend that same year.<sup>214</sup> One month later, he and his wife, along with a small entourage, undertook a health tour of the continent. Unable to lay down his pen, even in ill-health, Smollett undertook to write a travelogue of his journeys.

Travelogues were at the height of popularity—Smollett himself had worked on a *Compendium of Authentic and Entertaining Voyages* years before. Considering Britain’s recent international events and expansion, “it is hardly surprising that books of voyages and travels were among the most popular of the century.”<sup>215</sup> These travelogues were perhaps also an extension of the increasing identity of Britain as defined by that of “the other.” By examining different cultures on the continent and abroad, Britons were united by their own similarities. After all, as Linda Colley has suggested, “men and women decide who they are by reference to who and what they are not.”<sup>216</sup> Smollett’s own epistolary travelogue, *Travels Through France and Italy*, certainly demonstrated a particularly British sentiment.

Smollett’s descriptions of the residents of France and Italy illustrate the British prejudices toward their continental neighbors at the time. To him the French in particular displayed “a general want of

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<sup>214</sup>Smollett, *Letters*, 114.

<sup>215</sup> Feather, *History*, 96.

<sup>216</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 6.

taste, and a general depravity of nature.”<sup>217</sup> The French economic system resulted in an idle and superficial aristocracy and a wretchedly poor working population. Catholicism led them to “a frivolous taste for frippery and...a habit of idleness.”<sup>218</sup> All of the points on which Britain prided itself—its Protestantism, its industriousness, its relative wealth and quality of living—were starkly illustrated in the pages of Smollett’s travelogue.

It appears that *Travels*, published in a two-volume octavo edition upon his return in 1766, was fairly well received. It went through three editions, no doubt because Smollett’s sympathies were shared by many in Britain. So while some may read *Travels* as the misanthropic grumblings of a scurrilous old writer—one critic even suggested renaming the book “Quarrels Through France and Italy for the cure of a pulmonic disorder”<sup>219</sup>— it can also be read as a declaration of Britishness from a nationally hypersensitive Scot.

## Legacy

Smollett continued to publish upon his return to England. The *Present State of All Nations*, which he contributed to, and his *History*

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<sup>217</sup> Tobias Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy* (New York City: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 68

<sup>218</sup> Smollett, *Travels*, 36, 38.

<sup>219</sup> “Tobias Smollett,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online.



*and Adventures of an Atom* were both published in 1769. *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* was published just after his death. While Smollett's literary career lasted less than thirty years, from his arrival in London in 1745 to his death in 1771, he managed to produce a massive corpus of work, prolific by any standards. His career is intriguing in both context and content. As a Scottish writer working in London Smollett's career was swept up in a whirlwind of change that was sweeping across Great Britain. National identities, ideas of "Scottish," "English," and "British," were transforming and emerging.

The publishing industry produced the medium by which this identity was changed, transported, and scrutinized. Smollett's relationships encapsulated the Edinburgh-London publishing axis. He took his drinks and read his papers in the British Coffeehouse amidst the greatest minds of the Scottish Enlightenment. His poetry captured the conflicted emotions of a Scotsman desperate for Britishness. His novels offered a way for citizens to transcend and rethink their own identities. His periodicals directed and reflected public debates on culture, politics, and nationhood. And his self-reflection, as seen in his travelogues, his publications, and his correspondence, mirrored the hazy reflections of an entire nation.

## Chapter 4

### BEING BRITISH: PERCEPTIONS OF SMOLLETT THROUGH THE AGES

*Stay, traveller! If elegance of taste and wit, if fertility of  
genius and an unrivalled talent in delineating the  
characters of mankind, have ever attracted thy  
admiration, pause awhile on the memory of Tobias  
Smollett, MD ...*

—SMOLLETT MONUMENT, RENTON, SCOTLAND, 1774

In 1768 Tobias Smollett and his wife bid farewell to Britain for the last time and began their “perpetual exile.”<sup>220</sup> The Smolletts crossed the channel and travelled around Italy for awhile, stopping in Pisa and Florence to rest and visit friends. Finally they settled at Il Giardano, by all accounts a gorgeous estate near Leghorn, Italy, with a beautiful vista. Smollett described his new accommodations to a correspondent in 1770 as being on “the side of a mountain that overlooks the sea...a most romantic and salutary Situation.”<sup>221</sup> Smollett had forsaken England for Italy in a final attempt to seek health on the continent. The ailments that plagued him throughout his life, the asthma and consumption that had led him previously to seek

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<sup>220</sup> *Letters*, 136.

<sup>221</sup> *Letters*, 138.

the waters and cleaner air at Bath and Nice were leading to the “declining state” of his health.<sup>222</sup>

In January of 1771 he wrote to his friend John Hunter, “I am already so dry and emaciated that I may pass for an Egyptian mummy without any other preparation than some pitch and painted linen.”<sup>223</sup> It seems that Smollett was to the end hard at work, and his health, though poorly, did not stop him from visiting friends close by Il Giardano. And as ever, the abundance of his pen could not be stifled. He persisted in editing his epic *Ancient and Modern Universal History* and completed his final novel, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, which he had the satisfaction of seeing in print in the summer of 1771.

Only months later, on September 17, 1771, Tobias Smollett passed away, due most likely to an acute intestinal infection.<sup>224</sup> As Lewis Knapp described, “like a man-of-war, weakened, to be sure, by hard service, but still seaworthy for a season, he was swept down by an unexpected and overwhelming blast.”<sup>225</sup> Romantically, the last words he spoke to his wife were said to be, “All is well, my dear.”<sup>226</sup> Upon her

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<sup>222</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, 30.

<sup>223</sup> *Letters*, 140.

<sup>224</sup> Knapp, *Smollett*, 297.

<sup>225</sup> Knapp, *Smollett*, 297.

<sup>226</sup> Smeaton, *Smollett*, 118.

husband's death, Ann Smollett endeavored to have a monument erected in his honor. In a 1773 letter to one of Smollett's executors, Archibald Hamilton, she confessed,

Amidst the many cases of uneasiness, I have the particular one, to reflect that my dear Smollett has never yet had a monument rais'd up to his memory, which in this Country [Italy] is look'd at with astonishment, the more so as his Reputation was so well Known.<sup>227</sup>

In answer to her heartfelt concern, a monument was erected at his grave in the English section of the cemetery at Leghorn, with a Latin inscription written by fellow Scottish physician Dr. John Armstrong.

Part of the inscription reads:

Here rest the remains of Tobias Smollett, A North Briton, who...shone forth an example of the virtue of former times, of an ingenious countenance, and manly make...In honour to the memory of this most worthy and amiable member of society, Sincerely regretted by many friends, This monument was by his much beloved and affectionate wife dutifully and deservedly consecrated.<sup>228</sup>

His death was further memorialized closer to his home in Scotland. In 1774 yet another James Smollett, then tenant at Bonhill, commissioned a monument in tribute to his cousin, and "a splendid

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<sup>227</sup> Taken from Lewis Knapp, "Ann Smollett, Wife of Tobias Smollett," *PMLA* (45, 5, Dec 1930), 1041.

<sup>228</sup> Taken from Knapp, *Tobias Smollett*, 334.

obelisk, over sixty feet high, was raised on the banks of the Leven.”<sup>229</sup> The monument features a memorial plaque written in part by Samuel Johnson, in Latin because, as Johnson’s biographer James Boswell pointed out, “all to whom Dr Smollett’s merit could be an object of respect and imitation would understand it as well in Latin.”<sup>230</sup> The monument now stands on the grounds of Renton Elementary School, a tribute to Renton’s most prodigious native. It has since been translated into English, presumably so that the “Highland drovers, or other such people who pass and repass that way,”<sup>231</sup> can enjoy it as well.

In London and Edinburgh the news of Smollett’s death was met with the expected grief. His last novel was gaining status and repute—due in part to his timely demise—and, though he had been a contentious figure, he was well-regarded throughout Britain. *The Royal Magazine* posted the following obituary for the writer in the month following his death:

Death’s random darts too certainly transfix,  
And souls unwilling Charon’s sure to land ‘em;  
Ah, take some gloomier soul to gloomy Styx

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<sup>229</sup> Smeaton, *Smollett*, 120.

<sup>230</sup> James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LLD, together with the Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1884), 335.

<sup>231</sup> Boswell, *Samuel Johnson*, 335.

And give us back facetious Random.<sup>232</sup>

He was praised too by friends and readers on the continent, most especially in Italy. The Italians constructed a monument of their own, “on the banks of the Arno between Leghorn and Pisa,” entreating passersby to “respect the name of Tobias Smollett, An Englishman.”<sup>233</sup> The monument consisted of a tomb with plaques written in Italian, Latin, Greek, and English so that English sailors passing by could do homage to the writer.<sup>234</sup> Even the French, of whom Smollett had always been so critical, paid tribute to him upon his death. And Nice, the city about which Smollett wrote so vividly in his *Travels*, eventually dedicated a Rue Smollett to him, possibly in appreciation of the publicity he brought.

As a further testament to Smollett’s renown, a benefit was held to ease the financial burdens of his wife who, according to Anderson, was “left friendless in a foreign country”<sup>235</sup> upon her husband’s death. A performance of *Venice Preserved* was held at the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh in 1784, the proceeds of which were sent to Mrs. Smollett to

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<sup>232</sup> Royal Magazine (25, October 1771), 656. Taken from *Tobias Smollett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Lionel Kelly (London: Routledge, 1999), 216.

<sup>234</sup> Knapp, *Smollett*, 300.

<sup>235</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, 33.

“relieve her of some temporary distress.”<sup>236</sup> Knapp cites a newspaper article published days afterward that stated, “the very brilliant and numerous assembly did the greatest credit to the feelings of the public”<sup>237</sup> in their regard for Smollett and his widow.

In life Smollett’s reputation for generosity and good humor was matched only by his well-known inability to deal with criticism and perceived slights. As his cousin John Moore so delicately put it, “he was little influenced by prudential considerations, and never intimidated from avowing his sentiments by the fear of making powerful enemies.”<sup>238</sup> And much of the antipathy he roused was connected to his indisguisable Scottishness. Especially in his editing of the *Critical Review* Smollett faced a barrage of accusations regarding his supposed favoritism toward his countrymen. From the malicious pranks of his childhood to his outspoken criticism of Carthage and Culloden, to his very public feuds with Admiral Knowles and Wilkes, Smollett was never one to back down from a fight. He had made at least as many enemies as friends throughout his literary and medical careers, and was a constant figure in the press, whether for libel trials or thinly veiled personal attacks in his publications.

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<sup>236</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, 34.

<sup>237</sup> Quoted from Knapp, “Ann Smollett, Wife of Tobias Smollett,” 1045.

<sup>238</sup> Moore, *Smollett*, cxvi.

Yet for every detractor there were those who praised Smollett's hospitality and charity. Moore comments on the "sensibility, benevolence, and generosity of disposition which he possessed from the beginning to the end of his life."<sup>239</sup> The Sunday dinners he held for his luckless hack writers were much commented upon. And while Smollett was tireless in looking out for his luckless countrymen, his hospitality was not reserved for Scottish recipients. He was always willing to write a letter of introduction, to lend money, or to plead on a friend's behalf. Smollett's mercurial yet surprisingly tenderhearted nature was well-known at the time of his death. And furthermore, his works were exceptionally popular, "very widely read, not only in the British Isles, but also on the Continent and in America."<sup>240</sup> It should be no surprise, therefore, that there arose great curiosity about his life in the decades and centuries that followed.

### **Contemporary opinion**

There were a number of biographies written about Smollett soon after his death, many of which were undertaken by his friends and countrymen. The three most prominent were those of John Moore, Robert Anderson, and Sir Walter Scott. These three men, all Scots, had

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<sup>239</sup> Moore, *Smollett*, clxxix.

<sup>240</sup> Knapp, *Smollett*, vii.



a personal, and a national stake, in their portrayals of him. In 1796 Scottish physician Robert Anderson penned a biography of Smollett to be attached to an edition of miscellaneous works. Anderson's biography was complimentary in tone—in the introduction he writes, “Of the numbers of learned and ingenious men who have...added to the reputation of Great Britain by their writings, few will be found more deserving of biographical notice than the subject of this narrative.”<sup>241</sup> While the information in it was exceptionally vague and of hazy origin, his narrative laid the groundwork for those that followed.

One year later, Smollett's distant cousin, John Moore, was also commissioned to write a biography of the writer, to be attached to a compilation of his works. Like Smollett, Moore was born near Glasgow, attended Glasgow University, and was apprenticed to John Gordon. He too was a physician-cum-writer, and by the 1790s he had written a travelogue, a medical treatise, and two novels. Moore is unique among the biographers due to his intimate relationship with Smollett. Many friendly letters between them have survived. In one Smollett writes, “I have been for some weeks resolved to write you an account of my Health, about which I know your friendly sollicitude [sic].”<sup>242</sup> The two even met in Italy toward the end of Smollett's life. His biography was

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<sup>241</sup> Robert Anderson, *The Life of Tobias Smollett, MD, with critical observations on his work* (London: J Mundell & Company, 1796), 1.

<sup>242</sup> *Letters*, 129.

memorable in its description of his cousin's character, as there were not very many remaining who had personally known Smollett. He was able to add a personal touch in his description, and his image of Smollett in all his moods has become the basis for many similar observations.

Perhaps the most famous of the early Smollett biographies is that of Sir Walter Scott. Scott's *Memoir of the life and writings of the author* was attached, as the previous two had been, to a collection of Smollett's works, and was published in 1821. Paul-Gabriel Boucé stated it was, of all Smollett's biographies, the only one that could "be ranged in the critically desirable category of 'good literature'"<sup>243</sup> and is renowned for its romantic portrayal of the subject. Scott's vested interest in promoting the beauty and heritage of his native country are apparent in the writing, and he delves in a very author-like manner into Smollett's internal processes and thoughts. Boucé suggested that "a sort of biographical empathy flows between Scott and Smollett."<sup>244</sup> With all its appeal Scott's biography has come to be one of the most widely read of Smollett's *Lives*.

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<sup>243</sup> Paul-Gabriel Boucé, "Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Biographies of Smollett," *Tobias Smollett: Bicentennial Essays Presented to Lewis M. Knapp*, ed. G.S. Rousseau & J.P. Boucé (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 202.

<sup>244</sup> Boucé, "Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Biographies of Smollett," 213.

Due to the lack of concrete information about the events of Smollett's life, these biographies, and the ones that followed, have relied heavily on their predecessors for details. Furthermore, many, indeed the majority of them, rely also on his seemingly autobiographical fiction. Roderick Random especially has been confused with Smollett, despite the fact that, as Smollett himself stated that "the low Situations in which I have exhibited Roderick I never experienced in my own Person."<sup>245</sup> This lack of evidence, coupled with the interest in Smollett as a literary figure, has resulted in a slurry of "biographies" that focus heavily on the writer's personality—largely garnered from those of his characters, as well as the portrayal of Moore—and bestsellers, rather than the events of his life. At the same time it has paved the way for a very personality-driven cult to form around Smollett, which various writers have used accordingly.

Moore, Anderson, and Scott all portray Smollett in an overwhelmingly positive light. These early attempts to memorialize Smollett, written by Scotsmen from situations similar to his own, could have been attempts to cement the cultural and literary benefit Scotland had already contributed to the British Union in only a few short decades. They are complimentary, vivid, colorful biographies that

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<sup>245</sup> Smollett, *Letters*, 112.

emphasize Smollett's "utility and elegance...force and vivacity,"<sup>246</sup> as well as his rightful place in the English literary canon. In an era in which the effects of the Union were still being played out on a day to day basis, a Scottish writer, of a fairly common background, who had worked his way up in British society, and whose works had already come to mean so much to the people of Britain and Europe, seems to have been regarded as a national treasure.

### **Victorian Perceptions**

The nineteenth century witnessed a major shift in how the British perceived themselves. The "Celtic fringe" was becoming less fringelike and more central to the experience of Britain as a whole. As Robert Colls pointed out, "right from the start the whole project of learning how to be British depended on Scottish complicity."<sup>247</sup> Scots, who had contributed so greatly to the formation identity in the previous century, were becoming an integral part of the British narrative and patriotic myth. There was even rekindled debate over whether a true Briton was of Anglo-Saxon descent, or whether the nation had more Celtic origins. Colls stated that "British as *British* mythology...looked to the Celts who, though defeated and pushed west

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<sup>246</sup> Anderson, *Smollett*, 1.

<sup>247</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 282.

by invaders, were victorious in the longer, deeper, and more hidden affairs of the heart.”<sup>248</sup>

Many cite the movement for parliamentary reform that swept the nation in the early nineteenth century as further evidence for an increasingly inclusive ideal of Britain. Men on both sides of the border fought for increased representation by reforming traditional parliamentary membership. Linda Colley remarked upon the nationwide nature of public demonstrations of the period, in which “banners displaying images of specifically Scottish heroes—St Andrew, Wallace, and Robert Bruce—were raised indiscriminately alongside Union Jacks and flags embroidered with the figure of Britannia” signified the increasingly “single, unitary movement whose scope was Great Britain as a whole.”<sup>249</sup> If the Union of 1707 had enabled the Scots to participate in British economics, then the Reform Act of 1832 seemed to suggest that Scots could participate just as fully in British political life as well.

George IV visited Edinburgh in 1822, “the first time that a Hanoverian monarch had ever appeared in the capital.”<sup>250</sup> All the

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<sup>248</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 276.

<sup>249</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 338–9.

<sup>250</sup>Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The Highland Tradition of Scotland,” *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 29.

highland clans came out to greet him in full kilted regalia—a thoroughly modern, astoundingly *English* invention.<sup>251</sup> Writers like Sir Walter Scott and James MacPherson, with his dubious Ossian, were contributing to a separate Scottish cultural legacy, and the Highlands were becoming a source of major travel interest. Scotland, as it related to Britain, was gaining real standing. The anti-Scottish sentiment Smollett and his cohorts faced, while still existent, sought outlets in subtler forms.

Sometime in the nineteenth century a shift in Smollettian thought occurred. Smollett's entry into the literary canon opened him up to a world of professional Victorian criticism, a tradition he himself helped foster in the *Critical Review*. Unfortunately for Smollett, his taste for the physical offended Victorian sensibilities, and, from a literary standpoint, his reception was such “that if they came near Smollett they kicked him, and if they saw him at a distance they threw something.”<sup>252</sup> Victorian criticism usually opened with a “life of the author” preface, a feature which became increasingly popular in the

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<sup>251</sup> Trevor-Roper, “The Highland Tradition of Scotland,” 19. [Roper claims that rather than traditional highland wear, kilts and tartans were the advent of eighteenth century English ropiers, who exploited the Highland craze, especially post monarchical visit, by creating and marketing elaborate tartan “traditions.”]

<sup>252</sup> Bruce, *Radical Dr. Smollett*, 1.

age of biography in which the life of the writers garnered nearly as much attention as the writings they produced. The same was true with Smollett, though as Knapp pointed out, “it is unfortunate that in recent decades many brief sketches of Smollett’s personality are one-sided and erroneous...Such portraits are often Victorian.”<sup>253</sup>

George Orwell attributed Smollett’s fall from grace to “the rise of a new industrial middle class, Low Church in its theology and puritanical in its outlook.”<sup>254</sup> Beyond the physical, seemingly immoral content of his novels, Smollett began to be compared, and usually overshadowed by, fellow novelists, and Englishmen, Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson.

In the early 1800s William Hazlitt undertook a series of lectures about the Great English Novelists. In these lectures he compares the works of Fielding, Smollett, and Richardson—the original English novelists—and Smollett invariably comes out the worse for wear. While Hazlitt commends his voice and ability to caricature society, he decries the “tone of vulgarity about all his productions.”<sup>255</sup> It is interesting that Smollett should be so constantly compared to his

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<sup>253</sup> *Letters*, Introduction

<sup>254</sup> George Orwell, “Tobias Smollett: Scotland’s Best Novelist,” *London Tribune* (September 22, 1944).

<sup>255</sup> Hazlitt, *The Miscellaneous Works of William Hazlitt Vol. IV* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1857), 136.

English counterpart, Fielding, and even more interesting that Fielding has eclipsed him for posterity. It seems the Victorian critics made the common misconception of seeing Smollett in the lackadaisical morality of Peregrine Pickle and Roderick Random. As Professor O.M. Brack has stated, “Smollett’s reputation has been seriously damaged over the centuries by biographers and critics identifying Smollett with his literary creations.”<sup>256</sup>

Yet toward the end of the nineteenth century there were already attempts to redress this error, as can be found in the biographies of James Hannay, a Scot and a naval surgeon, and Edinburgh publisher Robert Chambers. Though these writers did not gloss over Smollett’s perceived flaws, they attempted, as Moore, Anderson, and Scott had before them, to sing the praises of their countryman. English novelists also paid tribute to Smollett. William Makepeace Thackeray and Charles Dickens both credited him with inspiring them in their own work.

Oliphant Smeaton’s biography is exceptionally laudatory, possibly because it was created for the “Famous Scots” literary series, which also sang the praises of Thomas Carlyle and James Boswell.

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<sup>256</sup> OM Brack, “Tobias Smollett: The Life of an Author,” from *Hearts Resolved and Hands Prepared: Essays in Honor of Jerry C. Beasley*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 17.



Smeaton is explicit in his praise of Smollett as a writer *and* as a Scotsman:

He has done much to make Scotsmen proud that their country had produced such a son...A Scot, in the narrow sense of the word, he cannot be considered. As a Briton he will be loved and cherished by a larger family of readers than would be the case did he only appeal to the sympathies of Scotland...Proud though we be as Britons to own such a genius as of our tongue, prouder still are we, as Scots, to hail him as akin to us in blood.<sup>257</sup>

Though Smollett experienced a fall from grace and a slide toward obscurity throughout the nineteenth century, there were numerous attempts to preserve his legacy and place him among the ranks of the great English writers. It is interesting that so many of these biographies were written by men who shared Smollett's nationality, and whose lives were filled with such similar experiences to his own. The foundation of Smollett literature set up by Moore, Anderson, and Scott was built upon by a century worth of biographers who, though falling into the autobiographical trap, attempted to portray the nuances of personality and literary genius that so defined Smollett.

### **A Modern Revival**

There has of late been a lot of commotion in the British state, commotion that threatens the Union that has existed since 1707. An

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<sup>257</sup> Smeaton, *Smollett*, 156.

anti-Union movement has been growing in the “Celtic fringe,” and Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have made steps toward dissolving the Union. In 1998 “historic acts for the devolution of the Union in Scotland and Wales”<sup>258</sup> were enacted, granting both these countries a parliament separate from Westminster. The first Scottish parliament since 1706 met in Edinburgh in 1999. Linda Colley suggests that these changes result from monumental shifts, both internally and abroad, in which “a small offshore island” can appear to be a “plaything.” These changes result in a “hunger for some kind of renewed anchorage, and often for a narrower, more traditional, seemingly more secure sense of who they are.”<sup>259</sup> Some predict that the very wires of Scottish and British identity “are set to be crossed.”<sup>260</sup>

Simultaneous with this reopened debate has been a resurgence of interest in the eighteenth century, and in Tobias Smollett in particular. In the early twentieth century Knapp declared that “in the past few decades, his reputation has increased.”<sup>261</sup> Scholars, especially those in the literary field, are attempting to redress the neglect that has shadowed Smollett for the past two centuries. The subtitle of

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<sup>258</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 195.

<sup>259</sup> Colley, *Britons*, xvii.

<sup>260</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 196.

<sup>261</sup> Knapp, *Smollett*, vii.

Donald Bruce's *Radical Doctor Smollett* reads "The recognition of a long-neglected novelist, contemporary of Johnson, Fielding and Swift." Smollett's work is being reintroduced to the English literary canon for its realism, its sheer readability, and its satirical portrayal of eighteenth-century society.

Several biographies have been published in the last century that attempt to examine the life of Smollett without falling into the trap of "inverted biography,"<sup>262</sup> as Paul-Gabriel Boucé termed it. Journalist Jeremy Lewis has even published a popular biography on the author, as a rebellion against the curious fact that "most of my friends read English [at University] and...seldom strayed from the 'canon.' To my irritation, none of them read a word of Smollett."<sup>263</sup>

As well as rekindling appreciation of Smollett as a writer, there is an emerging interest in Smollett as a Scotsman. As O.M. Brack stated in a recent article, "it is surprising that his biographers have not examined what it was like for an expatriate Scot, living in England, writing, not in Scottish, but in English, attempting to make a living with his pen in the mid eighteenth century."<sup>264</sup> Of course, much of the recent interest in British identity has not revolved specifically

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<sup>262</sup> Boucé, "Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Biographies of Smollett," 201.

<sup>263</sup> Jeremy Lewis, *Tobias Smollett*, London: Pimlico, 2004.

<sup>264</sup> OM Brack, "Tobias Smollett: The Life of an Author," 18.

around Smollett, but rather around the professional Scots—and most particularly the Scotch writers—who by making their careers in London helped to forge the British identity.

It seems that though Smollett made his name in England, and though he has been touted as a member of the English canon, there is no avoiding the fact that at the end of the day he was a Scotsman. And it seems that even after his death he constantly balances between his two identities, considered as a Scottish hero and a British literary figure. He was considered as such by his contemporaries, who saw in his nationality either great promise or potential sedition. And he has been considered as such by biographers throughout history, who have either discussed his nationality explicitly or mentioned it in passing. Their reactions to his nationality, whether they were conscious of it or not, could not help but affect their reactions to the man himself.

As Lewis stated, “All biographies have, or should have, an element of autobiography...whether explicit or oblique, or a mixture of the two.”<sup>265</sup> Moore, Anderson, and Scott may have been particularly conciliatory for a fellow Scot who lived and worked within their own lifetimes and within their social circles. Likewise, the Victorians who made their careers as professional critics of literature would have been affected by notions of identity in their own era, during which the

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<sup>265</sup> Lewis, *Smollett*, xix.

nature of Britishness changed so drastically. And the modern author, in studying Smollett, cannot help but be affected by the modern trend toward individual psychology, nationality, and identity. As the interest in the origins and definitions of the British identity grows, there may be a concurrent resurgence of interest in a writer who lived and wrote as he experienced it.

Today traces of Smollett can be found on the physical landscape, in street signs and monuments and gravestones. It can be glimpsed in the stories of a stream of novelists who expanded upon his format and his style, who credit his picaresque adventures for inspiring their own childhood imaginations. It can be seen in the modern tradition of outspoken, politically minded, activist writers who in satirizing their surroundings attempt somehow to alter them. And it can be sensed in the development of British identity as a whole, and that is perhaps the most significant legacy we can attribute to him.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSIONS

The preceding has attempted to illustrate how Tobias Smollett, a Scottish writer and physician and longtime resident of London, came to experience the formation of the British identity. There seems to have been a general move across the world throughout the eighteenth century toward the development of the “intangible forces”<sup>266</sup> of British identity. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson attributed the phenomenon to:

the spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became ‘modular,’ capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness...to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellation.<sup>267</sup>

For Anderson the major impetus behind this shift was the decline of the ancient religious means by which people traditionally defined themselves and, therefore, the Other. This idea could be applied to Great Britain. Though, as Linda Colley stressed, Protestantism was the major impetus for the formation of a British union, it was not the practice of Protestantism but rather the ideal of it that so fused Scotland and England. While church attendance was actual on the decline, “the Protestant world-view was so ingrained in this culture

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<sup>266</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 3.

<sup>267</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 4.

that it influenced people's thinking irrespective of whether they went to church or not."<sup>268</sup> Protestantism became less a practice and more an outlook. Presbyterian Scotland and Episcopalian England managed to get along so well because they saw their similarities as stronger than their joint differences to those on the Continent. Even the loosening of regulations against dissenters and Catholics at the outset of the nineteenth century could not shake the Protestant mindset. Thus a major aspect of the British identity lay in its Protestantism.

Another aspect of the British identity was the acceptance that people could exist in multiple states and have multiple loyalties simultaneously. Colls illustrated this strange notion as two wires: the British wire, and the Irish, Scottish, Welsh, or English wire.<sup>269</sup> So long as these two wires remained untangled, people could exist comfortably as, say, a Scotsman and a Briton. Colley stated this dichotomy when she expressed that "identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time."<sup>270</sup> Anderson defined it as "the sort of gradual absorption of populations into larger politico-cultural units."<sup>271</sup> This fluidity became especially important as the British empire

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<sup>268</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 31.

<sup>269</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 43.

<sup>270</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 6.

<sup>271</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 188.

expanded to include nations across the globe. The British identity was not a whitewash, enveloping and overwhelming nations into a mass of sameness. Rather, it was like a canopy, covering various nations at various times without substantially altering their fundamental characteristics. It existed “not as a homogenous stable unit, but as a dynamic process, a dialogue between heterogeneous elements.”<sup>272</sup> The necessarily changeable nature of British identity is perhaps one of its strengths, allowing for the fluctuations of its various parts.

In *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm states that “the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the ‘invention of tradition.’”<sup>273</sup> He defines this as the creation or repurposing of old traditions to match the needs of a new and traditionless society. In this way, the clans of the Highlands were kilted for George VI’s visit to Edinburgh in 1822, and MacPherson’s *Ossian* became a national British hero. When they united, England and Scotland were in need of a more universal national narrative, an invented tradition on which to base their newfound nationhood. The histories of Tobias Smollett and David Hume sought to do this, as did Sir Walter Scott and a host of novelists and poets. The near fabrication of a predestined Britain, with a noble

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<sup>272</sup> Leith Davis, *Acts of Union*, 1.

<sup>273</sup> Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, 14.



Celtic lineage, helped form the cultural backbone of the British identity.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, one of the major factors that fused Scotland and England so closely was the British preoccupation with economics. Indeed, in early British eyes, “stout-hearted commercial activity and ideal patriotism were one and the same.”<sup>274</sup> Increasing infrastructure created stronger economic ties between the two countries long before the Union, but one of the big draws of Britishness was the economic opportunity to those it presented. The professionalization of medicine, the military, and the literary marketplace, among others, indicate Britain’s move toward industrialization at the dawn of the industrial revolution. Furthermore Britain’s increasing dominance in overseas colonial commerce was a source of pride and unity. In a way, the nation’s capital culture became a sort of defining characteristic of the British identity.

As has also been illustrated previously, Britain was bonded on the notion that it was different, somehow superior to its neighbors. It was described in terms of a “promised land” that was ordained with particular rights and had particular advantages over others. It prided itself on the industry, virtue, and liberty of its inhabitants, who believed “their land was nothing less than another and a better

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<sup>274</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 58.

Israel.”<sup>275</sup> Whether this outlook influenced the events of the following centuries, as Britain succeeded in war and commerce to become the dominant power in the Atlantic, or whether those events fostered this opinion, the pride shared by the people of Great Britain has come to define that nation’s identity.

In the end we can say that, in the eighteenth century at least, the British identity was largely Protestant, multi-faceted and malleable, strengthened by a rich, slightly artificial cultural and historical narrative, conscientiously industrious, and fiercely proud. John Bull emerged at the end of the eighteenth century as a caricature of England. He was an invention of Scottish transplants attempting to deal with the innate hostility of life in London. But he was soon adopted, and has come to embody the British nation as a whole. He has changed over the years, from “the well-fed squire and the beleaguered shopkeeper,”<sup>276</sup> to an overburdened taxpayer, an arrogant imperialist, a self-righteous everyman, a caricature of all those images of England gone by, and much more. The British identity is necessarily as changeable as its cartoon representative, and setting it in concrete is, of course, not a possibility. Yet we can lay out a few core aspects of that

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<sup>275</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 30.

<sup>276</sup> Miles Taylor, “John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England, 1712 – 1929,” *Past and Present* (134, Feb 1992), 100.

identity, and we can state that the roots of those aspects found their origins in the eighteenth century.

It is in this period, of course, that Tobias Smollett lived and left his legacy. He experienced the formation of this identity on an emotional, economic, and intellectual level. His life, and the similarities it bears with so many of his era, is ideally placed to explore the effects his changing surroundings had on him, and likewise the effects he had on it. His early experiences seemed to prepare him perfectly for life as a Briton. He was born to a landed Scottish family near Glasgow, educated by prominent Scottish scholars, bred to a career in surgery, enlisted in the Navy, and transplanted to London. The bonds that existed between the Lowland Scots and the northern English helped create sympathy between the two nations. The role of the increasingly democratic education system was key to creating a common national language of scholarship and patriotism. The British Navy helped solidify bonds between disparate peoples and bolstered British pride. And the Scottish professionals who made their way south in search of career and fortune experienced firsthand the benefits of being British.

His career as a writer and editor put him at the center of the industry that was, as it grew, growing a sense of Britishness along with it. He worked in publishing as an author, a travel-writer, a

contributor, a medical writer, a reviewer, a historian, a translator, and an editor. His novels, in their portrayals of north Britons and south Britons alike, helped forge a literary sympathy between the two. His histories helped recast England and Scotland into a British national narrative. His periodicals enabled debate and dialogue between factions of British society. And his relationships with members of the London–Edinburgh publishing axis strengthened bonds of commerce and scholarship between the two countries.

Smollett's legacy offers an interesting glimpse into the changing notions of British identity throughout the centuries. His reputation was bolstered by similarly circumstanced Scottish writers soon after his death. It suffered at the hands of the Victorians, who saw in it a regrettably eighteenth-century lack of morality and uprightness. It was rekindled by later writers, many of them Scottish, who wished to vindicate his name and place him back among the ranks of the English canon. And it has experienced a recent surge in popularity due to an emerging interest in his era, in nationhood, and in identity.

After a careful examination, Tobias George Smollett has become, in the words of Barbara Tuchman, a glorious “prism of history.” He has left a rich legacy of writings, both formal and informal, for examination. Portraits, periodicals, letters, novels, travelogues, essays, and histories all reveal Smollett's reflections on his own time and

place. That he was so sensitive to criticism and so capable of expressing great feeling makes the study of him a particularly pleasing, enlightening experience. Through him we have learned about the formation of the British identity at ground level, what it was like to become British, to publish Britain, and to be regarded as British for all of posterity. With all the vagaries of the British identity itself, the study of Smollett provides an intimate and vivid picture of what that identity felt and looked like at the time of its conception.

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