

## Scottish Prose Non-fiction



**Spotlight:** Tobias Smollett

### Biographical Details



Tobias Smollett was born and raised in Dunbartonshire. He moved to London in 1739 at the age of 18. A wartime naval surgeon-turned-writer, Tobias Smollett enjoyed a rich and varied literary career. Throughout the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century in which he lived and worked, there seemed to be no genre to which Smollett would not turn his hand: the Scotsman wrote histories, prepared translations, authored picaresque novels, penned essays, produced satires, edited periodicals, composed journalistic pieces, and published travel writing. While other novelists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century came eventually to outshine his literary star, Smollett's prose is still recognised today as scholarly, thorough, and very well-informed.

### Publications of Interest



- *Travels Through France and Italy* (1766)
- *Complete History of England* (1756)

### Where to Begin?



- 'An Essay on the External Use of Water' (1752)
- 'LETTER XIII, NICE, January 15, 1764', *Travels Through France and Italy* (Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2010)
- 'LETTER XV, NICE, JANUARY 3, 1764', *Travels Through France and Italy* (Tauris Parke paperbacks, 2010)

### Style



- Hyperbolic
- Satirical/comedic
- Panoramic

### Core Themes



- The body
- Society and social norms
- People within place

### Contextualising



Smollett's prose non-fiction texts are characterised by their formal and generic hybridity. For example, his accurate and detailed observations of his travels through various European destinations are packaged as epistles – a literary device found in popular fictions of the time. Often, his more serious socio-political non-fiction is filled with hyperbole. More celebrated writers of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in literature – such as Laurence Sterne – poked fun at Smollett's idiosyncratic style, which they felt was inflated, pompous, and intransigent in its views.

### Understanding



Thinking about your chosen Tobias Smollett text, consider the following questions, geared towards checking understanding:

- Summarise **two negative** aspects that Smollett finds with the topic/issue.
- Summarise **two positive** aspects that Smollett finds with the topic/issue.
- Identify **ten** vocabulary words that you are unsure about in the passage and find each word's **denotation**.

### Analysing



Choose **one** of the features below and explain how Smollett uses it in his writing.

<b>Exaggeration</b>	<b>Word Choice</b>	<b>Jargon</b>	<b>Epistles</b> (letters)	<b>Structure</b>
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### Evaluating



Thinking about your chosen Tobias Smollett text, consider the following evaluative questions:

1. Some critics have argued that Smollett's descriptions of places and people are like "**verbal pictures**". Identify a **person** or **place** described in **Tobias Smollett's writing** and compare it to a painting by **William Hogarth**. What similarities can you find between these texts (word-based and image-based) from the same period?
2. Has the author made any **assumptions** about or shown any **prejudice** towards the people/communities /societies that he focuses on in his writing?
3. **What** is your **opinion** of Smollett's style of writing? Justify your answer.