Smollett, Tobias (1721–1771)

(smŏl'ĭt), 1721–71, Scottish novelist. After studying at Glasgow he came to London in 1739. Failing to get his tragedy The Regicide produced, he shipped as a surgeon's mate in the British navy the following year. In 1744 he returned to London with his wife, a Jamaican heiress, practiced as a surgeon for a time, and then began an active literary career. His first three novels, Roderick Random (1748), Peregrine Pickle (1751), and Ferdinand Count Fathom (1753), are tough, coarse, episodic adventure stories, exposing a crude and brutal society. In 1755, Smollett translated Cervantes's Don Quixote into English. His novel Sir Lancelot Greaves (1760–62), which is based on Don Quixote, is considered his weakest work. Smollett achieved his greatest success with Humphry Clinker (1771), a comical but sympathetic story of a family's adventures through England and Scotland written in the form of letters. These novels, rich in character, incident, and realistic detail, were drawn largely from Smollett's own wide experience. His influence on later novelists, most notably Dickens, has been great. In addition to writing he had an active publishing career, editing periodicals, translating, and compiling. His other works include a popular History of England (1757), an entertaining but splenetic Travels through France and Italy (1766), and a brutal satire on public affairs, The History and Adventures of an Atom (1769).
