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### **TOBIAS SMOLLETT AND THE CRITICAL'S REVIEWS OF CHARLES CHURCHILL'S POEMS, THE ROSCIAD AND THE GHOST**

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## Notes

### TOBIAS SMOLLETT AND THE CRITICAL'S REVIEWS OF CHARLES CHURCHILL'S POEMS, *THE ROSCIAD* AND *THE GHOST*

IN an article for the *Critical Review*, Smollett laments that he has been unjustly accused of 'damning works which he never saw' (CR 12, 283–4),<sup>1</sup> and, in a letter, of 'bestowing self-applause which he never uttered'.<sup>2</sup> That Smollett did find much to admire in his own works, and did indulge in 'self-applause' seems pretty certain. A close stylistic analysis of the reviews of David Hume's *History of England*, (CR 13, 58–65),<sup>3</sup> and of articles devoted to Smollett's own volumes of the *Continuation of the Complete History of England*, all for the *Critical Review* (CR 3, 481–99, CR 12, 283–95),<sup>4</sup> provides compelling evidence that Smollett wrote these admiring evaluations. Comparing his own style to that of Hume, Smollett noted that it is 'less close, energetic, and pointed, than that of our author [Hume]; but it is more chaste, flowing, sublime, and descriptive'. His work was 'superior', he suggested, 'in point of historical composition' to that of Hume (CR 13, 59–60).

When the predominantly negative appraisal of Charles Churchill's poem *The Rosciad* appeared in Volume 11 of the *Critical Review* (CR 11, 209–12) to the great consternation of the 'triumvirate of wits' (Lloyd, Colman, and Thornton) to whom the poem was attributed, Smollett rushed off a letter to David Garrick, disclaiming authorship of 'the offensive article': he would 'content himself', Smollett wrote, 'with declaring to [Garrick] that 'I did

not write one word of the article upon the Rosciad'.<sup>5</sup> He was clearly determined to put it about that this was a work he had not attempted to 'damn'. Referring to writers accused of condemning the work of their 'neighbours' in the 'republic of literary grubs', Smollett noted that: 'far from resenting the charge [these worthies] seem proud of the suspicion they have incurred: while their tongues disclaim the work, their significant nods, shrugs, and smiles, confess the imputation' (CR 1, 287). It was common practice—it seems—blatantly to deny any accusation of heavy-handed deprecation of another's literary efforts.

When Churchill retaliated by deriding Smollett in his next poem, *The Apology*, Smollett offered a robust line of defence. In the *Critical's* review of *The Apology* (which has been attributed to him by James Basker),<sup>6</sup> he asserted that 'no man, supposing himself qualified for the office of reviewer, would chuse to lay himself personally open to the illiberal revenge of every vulgar dunce, or low bred railer, who must naturally be supposed to smart from the critic's correction'; that the 'apologist' 'hath spouted his malevolence with open throat, foaming as it were at the mouth, and exclaiming like a fanatic possessed' at two 'gentleman' (Hamilton, the printer and Smollett himself), neither of whom 'were in any shape concerned in the article in the *Critical Review* at which this furious ecclesiastic pretends to have taken umbrage' (CR 11, 409–11).

However, not only does Smollett's claim to Garrick that since his release from prison, he 'had not time to write one article in the *Critical Review* except that upon Bower's *History*', appear to be false,<sup>7</sup> so too is there good reason to believe that Smollett was in fact the reviewer of the *Rosciad*. The reviewer of that poem reckoned that he had discovered the author/s of the *Rosciad* by his/their 'stile', though he was mistaken. But stylistic features in fact do point to Smollett as the author of the review of Churchill's work.

<sup>1</sup> For the attribution of this article to Smollett see Valerie Wainwright, 'Additions to Smollett's Journalism: Further Attributions for the *Critical Review*, 1757–1763', *N&Q*, lix (2012), 243.

<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of Tobias Smollett*, ed. Lewis M. Knapp (Oxford, 1970), Letter 67,85.

<sup>3</sup> For this attribution see Wainwright, 'Additions to Smollett's Journalism', 245.

<sup>4</sup> For these attributions see Valerie Wainwright, 'Smollett's Journalism: New Attributions for *The Critical Review*, 1757–1766', *N&Q*, lviii (2010), 525–6; and 'Additions to Smollett's Journalism', 243.

<sup>5</sup> *The Letters*, Letter 77, 98.

<sup>6</sup> James G. Basker, *Tobias Smollett, Critic and Journalist* (Newark: 1988), Appendix A, 264.

<sup>7</sup> Basker, *Tobias Smollett*, 248–52.

One of Smollett's tactics—and only Smollett seems to resort to this device in Volumes 1–15 of the *Critical Review*—is to accuse the writer of a work of which he disapproves, of revealing his 'ill-nature' in that work. This slur on the writer's character is to be found in several of Smollett's reviews, including those which can be most securely attributed to him: those indicated as by him in Hamilton's annotated copy of the first two volumes of the *Review* (\*\*CR 1, 42[B]; \*\*CR 2, 189[B]).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, and most significantly, this particular accusation is levelled three times at authors in the same volume (Volume 11), all in reviews which can be attributed to Smollett. It is characteristic of Smollett to repeat distinctive expressions and idioms in articles which appear in the same volume of the *Review*, though sometimes he provides variations on a theme: CR 8, 2, 'piddling walk'; CR 8, 86, 'A piddling reader'; CR 9, 66, 'Does the phlegmatic alderman'; CR 9, 289, 'the brain of a phlegmatic alderman'; CR 11, 186, 'and after running a long course, appear vigorous, fresh, and unexhausted'; CR 11, 324, 'that he will reach the goal unspent, unexhausted, and vigorous'.<sup>9</sup>

But there are other elements that point to Smollett as the author of the controversial review. Frequently Smollett adopts schemes of repetition, sometimes using different forms within the same article. In the review of the *Rosciad*, we find a sustained example of such a device ('the same . . . the same'), which is also to be found in other articles which he wrote for Volume 11.

When it appears in the *Review*, the term 'abusive' is usually adopted to describe political pamphlets; other usages of the term are to be found in articles that can be attributed to Smollett. The vulgar expression '*caw me, caw thee*' is a rare use of a Scottish proverb, which suggests that Smollett is more likely to have known it than an English writer.

Reviews of Churchill's poems *The Apology*, and *Night: an Epistle to Robert Lloyd* have

previously been attributed to Smollett.<sup>10</sup> In the review of Churchill's poem, *The Ghost*, Parts 1, 2 and 3 (CR 14, 301–9), the reviewer refers back to 'our observations on *Night*, a poem', and distinctive stylistic elements again suggest that Smollett is the author of this article. The terms 'ill-nature', and 'abuse' and 'scurrility' used in the poem are to be found in articles by Smollett in the same volume of the *Critical Review*.

### Abbreviations

[B] Articles attributed to Smollett by James Basker in *Tobias Smollett, Critic and Journalist*, Appendix A, 220–78.

[W1] Articles attributed to Smollett by Valerie Wainwright, 'Smollett's Journalism'.

[W2] Articles attributed to Smollett by Valerie Wainwright, 'Additions to Smollett's Journalism'.

### Elements from the review of *The Rosciad* and verbal echoes

The *Rosciad* is a well-written, **ill-natured**, ingenious, **abusive poem** . . .

We meet with *the same vein of* peculiar humour, *the same facility of* versification, *the same turn of* thought, *the same affected contempt of* the ancients, *the same extravagant praise of* the moderns, *the same autopihilism* (there's a new word for you to bring into your next poem) which we met with in the other . . .

*Caw me, caw thee*, as Sawney says, and so to it they go, and *scratch* one another like so many Scotch pedlars.

\*\*CR 1, 42 [B], their own futility and ill-nature; \*\*CR 2, 189[B], some ill-natured wag; CR 6, 292, [W1], all the ill-natured suggestions; CR 11, 2[W2], 'Essay on Criticism', A little wit and a great deal of ill-nature, will furnish the satyrist, but not the critic; CR 11, 75 [B], no more than ill-natured *χαῖμα*; CR 12, 178 [W2],

<sup>8</sup> James G. Basker, 'Introduction', *The Critical Review, or Annals of Literature, 1756–1763* (London, 2002), xv.

<sup>9</sup> For all these attributions to Smollett see Wainwright, 'Additions to Smollett's Journalism', 226–47.

<sup>10</sup> See Basker, *Tobias Smollett*, 264, and Wainwright, 'Smollett's Journalism', 537.

respects the ill-nature and impertinence of the author; CR 13, 395 [W2], possibly ill-natured and partial; CR 14, 440 [W2], these ill-natured writings; CR 15, 313–14 [W1], when he foams with ill-nature; disgraced with ill-nature.

CR 3, 384 [B], an abusive advertisement; CR 7, 154 [B], who in his abusive preface; CR 12, 160 [W1], of being accessory to the writing of a smart abusive poem.

CR 11, 449 [B], every little pedlar in literature.

CR 11, 315 [B], We find in both *the same* sort of apostrophes to the reader... *the same Sales Plautini*... *the same* whimsical digressions; and *the same* parade of learning.

CR 11, 186 [W2], They are characterized by *the same* elegant fluency of narrative, *the same* interesting minuteness, inimitable simplicity.

CR 8, 44 [B], Here the reader will find *the same* revolution of dull annals, *the same* recapitulation of unimportant and uninteresting incidents, *the same* diffusion and langour of stile, and the same attachment.

CR 9, 270 [W1] We have seen *the same* temperament of body, *the same* constitution of the air, *the same* regimen, and *the same* disease, described by different writers, in words and effect totally different.

CR 13, 66 [W2], Here we find *the same* unconnected rhapsody, *the same* rambling digression, the eccentric humour.

### Elements from the review of *The Ghost* and verbal echoes

We are always concerned to find genius and parts soured by spleen and **ill-nature** and to see our author stepping out of his way to degrade talents by **abuse and scurrility**... The third book of *the Ghost*, which, with regard to the propriety of its title, might as well have been called the Third Book of the *Æneid*, the *Dunciad*, the *Rosciad*, or any thing else.

CR 14, 444 [W2]: What especially gives disgust in these ill-natured writings. For 'ill-nature' see also the notes to the *Rosciad*; CR 14, 418 [W1]: poured forth in all their scurrility and abuse; CR 15, 60 [W1], though in our opinion, the words Iliad or *Æneid* would have been equally applicable.

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