



The Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane (The Works of Tobias Smollett)

Alain René Le Sage

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Tobias Smollett, in the preface to his first novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), acknowledges the influence of Alain René Le Sage's *L'Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane* (1715–35 in four volumes) on his work. By far the most successful of “useful and entertaining” romances, Smollett writes, *Gil Blas* describes “the knavery and foibles of life, with infinite humour and sagacity.” “The following sheets,” he adds significantly, “I have modeled on his plan.”

Smollett's translation of *Gil Blas* appeared nine months after the publication of *Roderick Random*. This chronicle of a merry, philosophical young man whose adventures lead him into all levels of society from the highest to the lowest, presents special problems for a translator. Smollett, without always adhering to the literal expression of the novel's language, is true to its style, spirit, and ideas. After two and a half centuries, his remains the finest translation of this humorous, satiric, and classic French novel.

In his early years in London, Smollett struggled to find a way to distinguish himself through his medical practice, medical writings, poetry, and plays. None of these attempts, however, allowed him to demonstrate the full range of his personality and talents. Only when he combined his own boundless imagination with the skills he had learned from translating *Gil Blas* was he able to create energetic narratives filled with vivid and original characters.

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