

Samuel Johnson 1775: *Viaje a las islas occidentales de Escocia* (ed. y trad. de Agustín Coletes Blanco 2006). Oviedo: KRK. 555 pp. ISBN 978-84-8367-003-3

María Luisa Pascual Garrido
Universidad de Córdoba
ffipagam@uco.es

Although not as celebrated outside the English-speaking world, Samuel Johnson is one of the most prominent figures of the British Enlightenment, as the use of the expression *the Age of Johnson* indicates. He is known as a great modern lexicographer, essayist, literary critic and biographer; but Johnson did not neglect other genres. In his final years he engaged in writing a suggestive travel book, *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) which is now available in Spanish – *Viaje a las islas occidentales de Escocia* (2006) – thanks to a remarkable edition by Agustín Coletes Blanco. Having Samuel Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* in its first Spanish edition is an event worth celebrating. The work, which has come to widen the range of Johnsonian works in Spanish, will surely have drawn the attention of those concerned with the European Enlightenment and travel narratives alike.

Johnson did not travel much during his lifetime but his early translations of Father Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia* (1735) and *Rasselas* (1759) suggest that he felt a great fascination for travelling and the trip he took in Boswell's company in 1773 must have been a long awaited experience. Always eager to expand his own knowledge, Johnson set out in his mid-sixties to explore the Highlands, a territory which he had imagined much more primitive. The *Journey* is certainly one of those pieces of writing in which Johnson's most scientific outlook is revealed and in that sense it is helpful in composing a comprehensive portrait of the author as a large-scale intellectual.

During his lifetime Johnson's opinions on countless issues deeply affected those who read his essays. His deliberations on the European oppression of America (*The Idler*, no. 81), female instruction (*The Rambler* no. 191) or the role of the intellectual (*The Adventurer*, no. 85) surely shaped the attitude of many of his contemporaries. However, it was the anecdotes attributed to him in the biographical works which proliferated after Johnson's disappearance that created a character larger than life. Among those, Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) is considered to be the most captivating and vigorous of all records. It seems that Boswell's biography contributed to glorifying Johnson the man as a great genius and conversationalist rather than to help appreciate his scholarly accomplishments in full. As a consequence, outside the academic world Johnson has been acknowledged mainly as the legendary character responsible for a never-ending list of sayings, becoming part of the popular lore. As Lynn puts it "by the time Johnson died in 1784, he had become much more than a well-known writer and scholar", reporting Johnson's remark that "[he] believes there is hardly a day in which there is not something about me in the newspapers" (1997: 240).

In Spain, Johnson's impact has been scant, at least when considered globally. Except for his philosophical novel *Rasselas* (1758), which has seen several Spanish editions since

1798, his works have hardly received attention until quite recently. One of the reasons is that the nation which exerted a deeper influence on Spanish culture during the eighteenth century was France rather than Britain. Culturally as well as politically speaking, Spain became a faithful follower of French models during the Bourbon period. For Spain that was certainly an age of reform and modernisation but it was also a phase marked by hostilities with Great Britain over the control of American possessions, and the Family Pacts with France. Now and again Britain's enemies were criticised by Johnson in the pages of periodicals and pamphlets, and Spaniards, judged as too imprudent to offset the British in their expansionist attempts, were no exception. Indeed, the Age of Johnson falls together with a historical period that marks the beginning of a prosperous ascent of Britain as a leading nation in the world. While for the English Johnson became a sort of cultural icon and patriotic figure, his work and opinions were utterly neglected by rival nations.

Johnson's marked Englishness made him certainly less appealing to a non-English-speaking readership. Concerned as it was mainly with native writers, Johnson's critical work was overlooked in Spain for several generations. Indeed, when compared with the volume of biographical, critical and editorial work on Johnson written in English (Clifford and Greene 1970; Tomarken 1994; Fleeman 2000) the absence of Spanish publications on Johnson's work, *Rasselas* excepted (García Landa 1990; Pajares 2000; Bolufer 2003, 2004; Establier 2007), is evident.¹ Only in the last two decades has a renewed interest in the English writer led Spanish scholars to make some of his best works available in their language.

A pioneering work in drawing the attention to Johnson's production was Bernd Dietz's *Las vidas de los poetas ingleses* (1988), a Spanish translation comprising nine out of the fifty-two essays Johnson completed in *Lives of the English Poets* (1765). Dietz's insightful choice of Johnson's work reflected a salient feature of the English author –that of the literary critic. This first edition of Johnson's *Lives* was crucial in encouraging other scholars to make Johnson's works better known in the Iberian book market. Although fourteen years apart, evidence of that mounting interest is the publication of *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765). This piece of criticism was first translated into Catalan –*Prefaci a les obres dramàtiques de William Shakespeare* (2002) – by John Stone and Enric Vidal. A year later, the Spanish version –*El Prefacio a Shakespeare* (2003) – by Carmen Toledano appeared, though lacking paratextual elements that could have illuminated readers on Johnson's contribution to Shakespearean studies.

Next in publication was the translation by Agustín Coletes Blanco of Johnson's account of his visit to Scotland in 1773 –*Viaje a las islas occidentales de Escocia* (2006). The book is closely analysed here on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of Johnson's

¹ José Ángel García Landa was the first to make a contribution to criticism on Johnson's *Rasselas* in Spanish scholarly journals. More concerned with Johnson's reception in Spain is Eterio Pajares, who focuses his attention on the first translation of *Rasselas* into Spanish. Recently, Johnson's first translator –Ines Joyes y Blake– has also attracted the attention of historians such as Monica Bolufer and Helena Establier, who have examined the crucial role played in the appropriation of Johnson's debate on female education by this member of the Irish community in Spain.

birth in 1709, which has fostered so many celebrations and cultural events to honour Johnson both in Britain and abroad.²

When considering Johnson's reception in Spain it is worth noticing that Boswell's biography of Dr. Johnson saw two full-length Spanish editions in 2007. The first *Vida de Samuel Johnson*, by José Miguel and Cándido Santamaría López, was foreworded by philosopher Fernando Savater, which granted it broad impact. The second was a translation by Miguel Martínez-Lage, who was accorded the 2008 National Translation Award for his achievement. The concurrence of new translations of the *Life of Samuel Johnson* testifies the increasing significance Boswell's *Life* and its protagonist have recently attained in Spain.

Coletes's Spanish edition of *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* is, however, quite distinct in its scope and nature when compared to other works by Johnson published so far in Spain. The originality of this translation lies in the fact that the text belongs neither to the category of literary criticism nor to that of fiction. Johnson's travel book should rather be considered the work of a modern geographer, sociologist and ethnographer who aims to discover what lies at the root of *otherness*. Johnson endeavours to explain the differences between the English way of life and that of the Highlanders, who were initially unknown to him and despised. Yet, Johnson's scientific report is implemented by philosophical assertions reminding the reader of the sententious style and truth-seeking stand typically found in 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' and *Rasselas*. In this respect Wiltshire (1997) declares that "the scientific and anti-romantic imperative – the drive to depict only what he saw and to recount only what he could be sure of – coexisted within a mind and imagination imbued with literary classics and with a desire to see the general within the instance, the need to enhance the particular with the aura of the universal" (213).

The hybrid nature of the *Journey* results not only from the various models of travel narrative that coexisted during the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries (69-106) but mainly from Johnson's broadness of mind, which allows the author to modify his first negative impressions and replace them with comments that acquit Highlanders of several charges. Hence, when examining the Scottish landscape in the early stages of the *Journey*, Johnson censures the native population for their negligence in the sowing of trees, only to explain later that the peculiar climatic conditions of the area may justify such bareness. Similarly, his complaints about the lack of basic commodities soon give way to a genuine appreciation for the Highlander's hospitality. As Coletes points out (95), the reader will appreciate a change of attitude as the trip progresses: Johnson's mixed feelings are gradually replaced by a growing pleasure at new discoveries. Wisely, Johnson closes the *Journey* excusing his occasional prejudice and initial ignorance: "Having passed my time almost wholly in cities, I may have been surprised by modes of life and appearances of nature, that are familiar to men of wider survey and more varied conversation. Novelty and ignorance must always be reciprocal, and I cannot but be conscious that my thoughts on national manners, are the thoughts of one who has seen but little" (Johnson 2000: 641).

² <http://www.johnson2009.org/events.html>

The Spanish edition of the *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* is an elegant 515-page volume. On the whole, Coletes has made an excellent contribution to the Johnsonian corpus in Spanish which is not to be underestimated. This impeccable edition is intended not only for scholarly use – although it will be highly appreciated by historians, philologists and geographers alike – but will gratify readers of all trades. *Viaje a las islas occidentales de Escocia* offers much more than Coletes's fully annotated version of Johnson's *Journey*: The Introduction (9-121) provides essential background information and a valuable synthesis of the multiple perspectives from which the *Viaje* may be interpreted. The first section of Coletes's study – 'El doctor Samuel Johnson (1709-1784): vida, obra y entorno literario' (13-34) – is intended to set the author in his specific cultural and literary framework. Next, a convenient outline of key historical events – 'La Escocia que conoció Johnson y sus claves históricas: de Caledonia a Culloden' (35-68) – supplies sufficient details on the complex network of political and religious interests at play between England and Scotland before the Union (1707) and up to Johnson's times. Essential to understanding the implications of Johnson's disappointment are the references made by Coletes to the transitional period in which the author and Boswell undertake their three-month journey. From the long-established feudal system, based on the privilege of Scottish clans, Scotland gradually develops in the two decades before this expedition into a more modernized society, though far behind in most aspects from England. Evidence of the Scottish evolution is given by referring to Watt's improvement of the steam engine, Adam Smith's defence of new economic principles, and Hume's philosophical thought (65). 'El Viaje a las Islas Occidentales de Escocia como libro de viajes. Género, estructuración y contenido' (69-108) aims to set the book in the context of eighteenth century travel narratives and traces its emergence as a hybrid genre. The closing section – 'Bibliografía comentada: fuentes primarias y secundarias. Esta edición y traducción' (109-21) – illustrates Coletes's conscientiousness as a scholar and translator, for it comments on an updated list of primary and secondary sources used to enhance his excellent work on Johnson and his *Journey*. Finally, it is worth noting that the edition is garnished with a map of the route followed by Johnson, and contains portraits of Johnson, Boswell, Johnson's wife and Hester Thrale, with illustrations of the sites described by the traveller.

Regarding the translation method, Coletes (118-21) avoids domesticating the original but opts for *montañés* as the equivalent for *Highlander* instead of *habitante de las Tierras Altas*, which is devoid of the regional connotations the word may evoke in the North of Spain. However, to preserve the local flavour, he sensibly borrows Scottish words such as *coot* (166), *kail* (186), *plaid* (189), *kirk* (189), *glen* (219), *lough* (228), *brogues* (253), *filibeg* (256), *cairn* (261), *sgailc* (265), *dun* (303), *laird* (334), *tacksman* (335), *quern* (369) and *seanachadhis* (387). Translators of Johnsonian texts must be aware of false friends – as in *political*, *computation* or *distinction* – and the frequent use of Latinate vocabulary which conveys the impression of elegance and formality in English. Coletes's version is faithful in this regard, for he resorts to archaic expressions such as *principiar* (244), *prima tarde* (247) or *munificencia* (617). The Johnsonian essayistic style, recognisable for its balanced assertions, complex subordinate structures, embedded clauses and stretched periods in the argumentative passages, is also a challenge for the translator. The intricacy of the original is difficult to convey when

translating into Spanish. The main reason is that the distinction between a cultivated tone and a more neutral style in a Romance language such as Spanish does not rely so obviously on an alternative lexical choice to the native and more familiar word as in English. Johnson's rhetoric may almost go unnoticed in a plain Spanish version but again Coletes manages to preserve the marked style of the original by resorting to compensation strategies – the use of paraphrase for ready-made one-word equivalents – and avoiding the restructuration of sentences for the sake of naturalness in the target language.

The use of notes is in general adequate, particularly when cultural and historical references remain vague in the original or no familiarity on the part of Spanish readers is presumed. However, some footnotes –124, 126, 132 – may seem irrelevant, for they distract the attention of the reader as they pertain to the identity of some minor character. Similarly, a few linguistic notes – as that on *kirk* (189) – could be spared since the essential information is given by Johnson himself in the body of the text.

An extraordinary documentary task underlies this edition. This is patent in Coletes's effort to clarify the significance of historical characters and events or even correct Johnson's impressions by an extensive comparison of various editions and secondary sources. Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) is mainly resorted to for the sake of accuracy but also modern English editions of the *Journey* – Lascelles (1976) and Levi (1984). As a result, Coletes spots some inaccuracies in the Johnsonian text and introduces amendments.

In an age of travel lovers, the Spanish edition of this exceptional eighteenth-century guide to the Hebrides is worth reading, as it offers the opinions of one of the most highly-regarded minds of the British Enlightenment, with all its virtues – political correctness was not one of them – and vices. *Viaje a las islas occidentales de Escocia* is the result of Coletes's long acquaintance with eighteenth century travel literature combined with his understanding of translation theory and his admiration for Johnson's *oeuvre*. Agustín Coletes Blanco certainly accomplishes something very unusual these days –to make the reading of an eighteenth century travel narrative a pleasurable and stimulating experience.

Works Cited

- Bolufer, Mónica 2003: 'Traducción y creación intelectual de las ilustradas españolas: el ejemplo de Inés Joyes y Blake'. G. Espigado and M. J de la Pascua, eds. *Frasquita Larrea y Aherán. Europeas y españolas entre la Ilustración y el Romanticismo*. Ayto. Puerto Sta, Maria/ Universidad de Cádiz: Cádiz. 137-55.
- Bolufer, Mónica 2004: 'Inés Joyes y Blake: una ilustrada entre privado y público'. Rosa M. Capel, ed. *Mujeres para la historia: figuras destacadas del primer feminismo*. Madrid: Abada. 27-55.
- Boswell, James 1980 [1791]: *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. Ed. Robert W Chapman, Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Establier, Helena 2007: 'El matrimonio intelectual de Inés Joyes y Samuel Johnson: la traducción española de *Rasselas, príncipe de Abisinia* en la ideología de género de la Ilustración'. M.Carmen García, Isabel Morales, Fátima Roca and Joséa. Hernández, eds. *Lecturas del Pensamiento Filosófico, Estético y Político*. Cadiz: Universidad de Cádiz. 443-54.

- Fleeman, J. D. 2000: *A Bibliography of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Treating His Published Works from the Beginnings to 1984*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon.
- García Landa, José Ángel 1990: 'Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*: The Duplicity of Choice and the Sense of an Ending'. *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 19–20: 75–99
- Johnson, Samuel 1798: *El Príncipe de abisinia: Novela[...]* *Va inserta [...]* una apología de las mugeres en casta oiginal de l traductora. Trans. Inés Joyes and Blake. Madrid: Imprenta de Sancha.
- Johnson, Samuel 1976 [1775]: *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. Ed. Mary Lascelles, New Haven and London: Yale UP.
- Johnson, Samuel 1988: *Vidas de los poetas ingleses*. Ed. and trans. Bernd Dietz. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Johnson, Samuel 2000: *The Major Works*. Ed. Donald Green. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Johnson, Samuel and James Boswell 1984: *The Journey to the Western Islands Scotland and The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*. Ed. Peter Levi. London: Penguin.
- Lynn, Steven 1997: 'Johnson's Critical Reception'. Greg Clingham, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 240–53.
- Pajares, Eterio 2000: 'Contra las "Belles infidèles": La primera traducción al español del *Rasselas* de Samuel Jonson'. *Trans* 4. 89–99.
- Tomarken, Edward 1994: *History of the Commentary on Selected Writings of Samuel Johnson*. Columbia: Camden.
- Wiltshire, John 1997: "'From China to Peru": Johnson in the Travelled World'. Greg Clingham, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 209–23.

Received 6 October 2009

Accepted 9 October 2009

M^a Luisa Pascual Garrido (PhD Córdoba) is a Lecturer in the Department of Filologías inglesa y alemana of the University of Córdoba. Her main research areas are Translation Studies (reception through translation), Contemporary American literature (Sylvia Plath, Paul Auster, Joyce Carol Oates) and eighteenth century literature in English. She has published on the work of Sylvia Plath, Russell Hoban, and on Cervantes's translations. She has co-edited and co-translated Hoban's *Riddley Walker (Dudo Errante, Berenice, 2005)*, the AEDEAN Translation Award in 2005, and more recently a Spanish edition of Johnson's *Rasselas (La historia de Rasselas, principe de Abisinia, Berenice, 2007)*.

Address: Dpto. de Filologías inglesa y alemana, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Plaza del Cardenal Salazar, 3. Universidad de Córdoba, Córdoba 14071. Tel.: +34 957 218812. Fax: +34 957 218427.