

REVIEW

**SAMUEL JOHNSON.
VIAJE A LAS ISLAS
OCCIDENTALES DE
ESCOCIA. ED. Y TR.
AGUSTÍN COLETES
BLANCO. OVIEDO: KRK
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One of the strangest pairings ever envisaged for a journey, a mixture of Tweedledum and Tweedledee with Quixote and Sancho thrown in, took place in the year 1773, when the 63 year-old Englishman Samuel Johnson, better known as Dr Johnson, and the 32 year-old Scotsman James Boswell set out on a journey across Scotland to the Western Islands. Their journey took them, amongst other places, from Edinburgh to St Andrews, Aberdeen, the Highlands, the Western Islands, including Iona, back to the mainland, Loch Ness, Glasgow and once more to Edinburgh. An account of the journey was written by Dr Johnson and published in 1775. Titled *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, it shows us a Scotland completely different from the romantic view held by many people. It is a land in which comfort, not to mention luxury or opulence, is practically unknown. Practically devoid of roads and bare of trees with inns for travellers few and far between, and one of the few staple items of diet being whisky – often consumed for breakfast – it seems an unlikely venue for an ageing grumpy Englishman who had never travelled before and who was used to the ease of living in the city, to cut his travel teeth.

But this is what he did. Accompanied by his faithful squire Boswell, and braving the discomfort of travel on horseback or on foot through uneven and often dangerous terrain, he spent the late summer and early autumn of 1773 visiting places, seeing sights, talking to people and taking note of all his experiences and observations. The result is a fascinating travel book laced with the acute, often acerbic and generally wise observations of one of the greatest authors in English literature. It is not Dr Johnson's best-known book – he is

more famous for his Dictionary of the English Language or his Rasselas Prince of Abissinia, both written prior to 1773, and his Lives of the English Poets, published in 1781 – but it has been considered a masterpiece since its first publication in 1775, written in Dr Johnson's inimitable style and has been reprinted numerous times.

Yet, strange to relate, it has not been translated into Spanish until now. But the result has made the wait worth while. *Viajes a las Islas Occidentales de Escocia*, translated and with an ample introduction by Dr Agustín Coletes Blanco, and published by KRK Ediciones, Oviedo, (2006), is a handsomely produced book, a little gem which can take pride of place on any bookshelf. The translation by Dr Coletes does justice to the careful weighed prose of the original; with no attempt to embellish or “modernize”, we are put into the mind and mode of one of the ablest prose writers in English literature. The Introduction, ample enough to satisfy even the most demanding reader, since it comprises some hundred pages, is divided into three parts. The first part examines Dr Johnson's life and literary output, seen against the backdrop of the literary scene of the day. The second part takes a look at the Scotland Dr Johnson encountered on his journey and gives mention of the most relevant events in Scottish history. The last part examines Johnson's book in the light of travel literature, especially that written before Johnson's time or contemporaneous with him. The book also contains over 200 explanatory footnotes, interesting maps and illustrations and has a bibliography that makes reference to all the important primary and secondary sources the translator used and the *modus operandi* of the latter.

With regards this last point, it is sufficient to end this review with the translator's own words: “... a la hora de optar por uno de los dos tipos básicos de equivalencia – el orientado hacia la lengua origen o el orientado hacia la lengua meta – he procurado apostar por el primero, en consonancia con la teoría y la práctica traductológica actual y evitando así una excesiva ‘domesticación’ del texto.”