

Review of Daniel Defoe's *Diario del año de la peste*, edited, translated, & annotated by Antonio Ballesteros González & Beatriz González Moreno (Madrid: Cátedra, Letras Universales, 2025, pp. 411 ISBN: 978-84-376-4910-8).

The recent edition of Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), published by Cátedra in its Letras Universales series, represents a significant contribution to eighteenth century literary studies and to the broader reflection on how literature engages with public health crises. Edited, translated and annotated by Antonio Ballesteros González and Beatriz González Moreno, the volume offers a rigorous Spanish translation and a critical framework that situates the work at the intersection of fiction, historical chronicle, and moral essay.

Defoe, best known for *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), remains a central figure in the English literary canon. *A Journal of the Plague Year*, published in 1722 but situated during the 1665 outbreak of bubonic plague in London, is one of Defoe's most complex and genre-defying works. Written as a fictional diary by a narrator identified only as H.F., the text blends personal testimony, social observation, and moral reflection, articulated in a prose style that oscillates between empirical precision and emotional intensity.

This edition stands out for its balance between philological rigor and accessible exposition. The extensive and well-documented introduction provides a panoramic view of both the historical context of the 1665 plague and the cultural moment in which the book was published, during the rise of journalism –Defoe himself excelled as a pioneer in this profession– and nonfiction prose in eighteenth-century England. The editors emphasize the text's generic ambiguity –variously read as novel, chronicle, pamphlet, or essay– and its resistance to conventional narrative classifications.

One of the present edition's most valuable contributions is its attention to the discursive complexity of the text. The narrator, H.F., is

not a passive witness but an interpretative and moralizing subject. His account reflects tensions between faith and reason, divine providence and civil governance, individual experience and collective memory. Taking these aspects into account, Defoe's work may be read as a meditation of human fragility and the capacity of societies to organize themselves in the face of catastrophe.

The Spanish translation, undertaken by the editors themselves, is fluid and faithful to the original tone. Ballesteros and González adopt a sober register that avoids unnecessary archaisms while preserving the gravity and reflective quality of the prose. Translation choices are justified in the notes, which provide lexical clarifications, cultural references, and historical explanations without overwhelming the reader. This adequate balance between accessibility and scholarly depth is one of the edition's most recommendable achievements.

The critical apparatus is thorough and relevant. Footnotes explain specific terminology, religious references, and relevant aspects to understand the novel and its historical context, which allow readers to appreciate the text's intertextuality density and its place within a discursive tradition that merges empirical observation with moral interpretation.

The introduction of Ballesteros and González also includes a section on the critical reception of the work, from the eighteenth century to the present. It highlights the *Journal's* influence on later literature, from nineteenth-century realism to contemporary pandemic narratives. Without resorting to anachronism, the editors suggest that Defoe's text offers valuable insight into how societies respond –culturally and ethically– to collective illness, a theme that has regained urgency in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From a publishing standpoint, the volume meets the high standards of the Letras Universales series. The typography is clear, the layout coherent, and the organization of content facilitates consultation. A selective bibliography guides readers toward essential scholarship on Defoe,

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the 1665 plague, and eighteenth-century English literature.

Overall, this edition of *A Journal of the Plague Year* is a major contribution to eighteenth-century studies. It not only recovers a foundational text of the English canon but also equips readers with the tools for a critical and contextualized reading. The work of Ballesteros and González belongs to a tradition of scholarly editions that combine philological precision with critical sensitivity, enabling contemporary readers to engage deeply with texts from the past.

The edition also holds considerable pedagogical value. Its clarity and documentary richness make it suitable for courses in English literature, cultural history, medical humanities, or narrative theory. The figure of H.F., with his blend of Enlightenment rationalism and religious anxiety, provides a compelling entry point for discussions

of ideological tensions in the eighteenth century and of literary representation of trauma.

In conclusion, this edition of *A Journal of the Plague Year* is a reference work that enriches the Spanish-language scholarship on Defoe. Its combination of precise translation, contextual introduction, and rigorous annotation makes it an indispensable resource for scholars and students alike. At a time when plague literature has regained cultural relevance, this edition reminds us that past texts continue to speak powerfully to present concerns.

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Raúl MONTERO GILETE
Universidad del País Vasco /
Euskal herriko unibertsitatea

