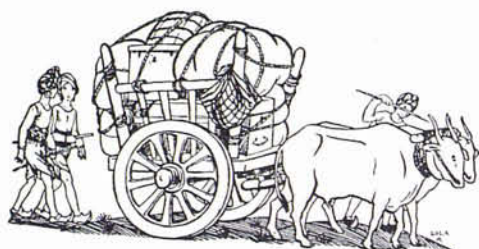


PUBLISHING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

FOLLOWING THE RECOVERY OF DEMOCRACY IN 1977 AND THE SUBSEQUENT LINGUISTIC RECOVERY, CATALAN PUBLISHING ACTIVITY HAS INCREASED REMARKABLY, ESPECIALLY THE PUBLICATION OF BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, MAINLY AS A RESULT OF PRESSURE FROM CATALAN SCHOOLS.



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In the last few years, especially following the recovery of democracy in 1977, there has been a considerable increase in Spain of the production and consumption of books written in one of the three languages which suffered at the hands of Franco's dictatorship: Catalan, Basque and Galician. The consolidation of the historical autonomies (Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia) and the co-official status of their own respective languages alongside Castilian represented a cultural challenge: that of the recovery of the language, something which called, obviously, for the development of publishing.

In Catalonia, Barcelona, a Mediterranean city and seat of the 1992 Olympics, has always played an important part in Spanish publishing activity. More than half the Spanish publishing companies are concentrated in Barcelona. Amongst these companies, the ninety

that are devoted to publishing in Catalan have been set up principally over the last twenty years, as a result of the increased demand arising from the linguistic recovery. Particularly important, in view of the constant pressure from schools, has been the rate of growth in Catalan books directed at children and young people: fiction, text books and reference books. In fact, the schools of Catalonia, which had largely committed themselves to teaching the language from the time it was made co-official, became fully involved after 1982, the year in which, following the linguistic normalization law, Catalan was once more not only an obligatory subject for study but also a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge.

Now, at the beginning of the nineties, the school is still the main, not to say the only, channel for the diffusion of books for children and young people, since the network of public libraries and, es-

pecially, their funding are insufficient. The total number of books they have, divided amongst the six million inhabitants of Catalonia, gives an average of one book per inhabitant, a figure well below the two or three recommended by the IFLA (International Federation of Librarians' Associations) and UNESCO.

The production of books for children and young people has doubled in the last three years and exceeds three thousand titles a year, representing 30 % of the total of Catalan publishing (19 %, children's and young people's fiction, and 11 %, text and reference books), surpassed only by fiction for adults (34 %).

The children's and young people's offer in Catalan publishing is concentrated in some fifty publishers. The average edition of this type of book runs to three thousand copies. Approximately 50 % of titles disappear when the first edition



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is sold out, 25 % reach a second edition and the rest the third or more.

The need to offer schools competitive prices within their reach almost always limits the publisher's choice of format for children's and young people's collections to pocket-size, in other words, to limited dimensions, and usually printed in only one ink. Very rarely do they venture to print large-format, full-colour books, such as illustrated albums. This presents problems when the rights are acquired for a foreign book of these characteristics, which inevitably has to be compressed, with a subsequent reduction in quality, so as to fit it into a pocket-format.

Selection criteria to decide which books to publish vary from one publisher to another. One financial criterion is the priority given to originals by Catalan authors, since they reach the highest sales figures (90 % of books chosen by schools are by native authors). In spite of this, they cannot form the basis of publishers' collections, as literary production wouldn't be enough to satisfy the demand. Their efforts are therefore aimed at maintaining a balance between Catalan originals (51 % of the total) and translations from other languages (49 %).

One selection criterion that publishers and, in turn, authors are often forced to renounce as a result of market pressures is that of literary quality. At the moment, because of current inflation, the Catalan literary landscape is slightly polluted.

A third, ideological selection criterion, that of the educational value, is applied only by those publishers with their own distribution channels, who therefore have easy access not only to bookshops but also to schools. The only criterion which is unanimously accepted by all publishers is of a moral order: no book for children or young people must ever cause despair in the reader.

At present, all the trends from all over the world are represented in children's and young people's fiction: adventure, mystery, crime, gangs, humour, science-fiction, interaction, critical realism, fantastic realism, love...

More and more Catalan authors are specialising in this field; it is estimated that there are some six hundred writers in Catalonia, of which about a hundred and fifty write for children or have done at some time. Although none of them have difficulties finding a publisher for their work, very few of them can live exclusively from writing and all of them have other sources of income. As a result, their output tends to be irregular in terms both of rhythm and quality. This is not the case of the one hundred and fifty Catalan illustrators, who can get by on the basis of their illustrations. But neither one nor the other have exclusive contracts with one publisher, which is why their work is generally split up and scattered around the country's publishing companies and it is difficult to negotiate with foreign publishers, who are used to dealing with a single interlocu-

tor when purchasing the rights for a given author.

As regards the offer in text-books and reference books, this is concentrated in some fifteen publishers, amongst which the ones with the best market penetration are those that belong to Castilian companies based in Madrid. For this reason, the number of Catalan originals is lower than we find in children's and young people's fiction, and on the other hand there is a marked increase in the number of translations from Castilian. Editions of text books, the best-selling books on the Catalan market, average about seven thousand copies each.

As regards reference books (dictionaries, encyclopaedias, etc.), the offer is somewhat scant. As happens with albums, publishers rarely risk books of this kind, which are very expensive to produce and very difficult to sell, since the schools, the only purchasers, cannot afford them. This is why the few reference books to be found on the Catalan market are generally of foreign origin and suffer from the problems of adaptation that books of this kind tend to have when taken out of context: remote cultural references, descriptions of botanical and zoological phenomena or species which are unknown locally, a distorted historical view, etc. Unfortunately, this same defect is often to be found in text-books translated from Castilian texts conceived outside Catalonia. ●