

Panorama of a New Century: Children's Literature in Catalan

by TERESA MAÑÀ



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Teresa Mañà takes the pulse of children's literature in Catalan and determines that it has a normal healthy heartbeat. Our readers will learn about what constitutes normalization and the status of the vital signs among major publishers, authors, and illustrators. In the process they will enjoy a sampling of the outstanding literature that has been produced in Catalan.

Since the 1990s and into the first decade of the 21st century, the panorama of children's and young adults' literature in Catalan presents several positive characteristics similar to those of Castilian publications for young people. This includes abundant production, a wide range of authors (including names with a long career as well as the arrival of some new voices), a diversity of genres (with the exception of theatre which remains a small presence), an extensive and broad offering that is fed by the constant appearance of new collections for all ages, and – to top it off – a generally high level of quality. Despite its late incorporation into the market, due to the fact that until the 1970s publishing in Catalan was forbidden, Catalan children's and young adults' literature has consolidated itself and become professional with the passing of the years. In the view of the critic Josep M. Aloy in his 2007 assessment in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Catalan Council for Children's and Young Adults'

Books (ClijCAT), our literature stands up to any comparison with books published in other countries. The situation now is normal and normalized.

Signs of normality: Publishers, authors, and illustrators

The good health of children's books in Catalan is apparent in the quantity of businesses that publish children's books as well as in the long list of

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authors and illustrators, many of whom are able to dedicate themselves professionally to writing only for children and young people. It should be remembered, however, that the publication of children's and young adults' books in Catalan coincides more and more with Castilian editions, given that books are published simultaneously or with little time delay in both languages.

With the new century there was a certain stirring in the publishing houses. On the one hand, mergers and buyouts have wiped out publishers who mark the history of Catalan children's books (for example, La Magrana was taken over by RBA, and all of those that currently fall under the umbrella Grup 62 are now owned by Planeta such as Destino, Empúries, Columna). Yet on the other hand, new initiatives and independent labels have arisen with a renewed purpose: the stories focused on nature published by Lynx, the art books by Serres, the small format books by Sb, the beautiful editions of Anglo-Saxon classics by the publisher Flamboyant, the original illustrated books by Thule, and the books by El Zorro Rojo add to more classic offerings such as the novels from Edicions del Pirata and Edicions del Roure de Can Roca.



Serra, Sebastià
3 contes de sant Jordi

Continuing their activity of many years, one finds veteran publishers such as La Galera, which has been publishing for children for more than four decades, alongside the emblematic Juventud, which continues its journey that began in 1925, as well as the publications by Abadia de Montserrat, which is unique in only publishing books in Catalan. To this list must be added Catalan divisions of the big groups (Cruïlla of SM, Barcanova of Anaya, Baula of Luis Vives, Grup Promotor of Alfaguara), and those that publish textbooks while simultaneously maintaining a line of children's books (Edebé, Casals with the labels Combel and Bambú). Among those houses that publish in Catalan, the efforts of foreign labels should be mentioned, too: Ekaré, Fondo de Cultura Económica and other national ones, Kalandraka, OQO, Lóquez. Thanks to them our children can read classic titles by Maurice Sendak, Anthony Browne, and Chris van Allsburg in their own language.

Also deserving special mention are the Valencian publishers who, through tenacity and imagination, continue in a less popular linguistic medium. They strive to widen the range of offerings with new collections

and with a profusion of books with careful design and production, which makes possible the increasing renown of children's and young adults' books in Valencian outside the region. The two widest-reaching publishers are Tàndem and Bromera, but one must also recognize others such as Edicions del Bullent, Marfil, Brosquil, or Perifèric edicions, which have also happily taken root. By contrast, the production of publishers based in the Balearic Islands is minimal, and authors of this region usually publish through Barcelona's houses.

As far as creators go, the *Diccionari d'autors* ("Authors Dictionary"), produced by the ClijCAT, includes 262 authors and illustrators who have each published at least five works to date. If we look at each of these names, we can see that publishing production is largely centered around authors with many years' experience.

Continuing in the breach are those authors and illustrators who began and continued the genre during the years of recovery – such as Joaquim Carbó, Emili Teixidor, Josep Vallverdú, who have had their complete works published, as well as Sebastià Sorribas (deceased in 2007). In the 1970s and 1980s, Mercè Canela and Pep Albanell emerged in Catalonia, Janer Manilla and Miquel Rayó in the Balearic Islands, and Enric Lluch and Maria Jesús Bolta in Valencia. To these must be added, in the 1990s, a good handful of creators who account for a large part of the titles published in the first decade of this century. Our young readers can enjoy the versatility of Joan de Déu Prats and Joan Armangué, the irony of Salvador Comellas, the love of nature that Pere Martí and Josep F. Delgado impart, the realism and daily life that suffuse the works of Jaume Cela and Pau Joan Hernández, or the delirious situations created by David Nello and Pasqual Alapont. In these years the abundant work in Catalan by Jordi Sierra I Fabra should also be remarked upon, as he is the most fertile of Spanish authors who works indiscriminately in both languages.

The generational relay race continues with new voices, such as that of Carles Sala (winner of three prizes last year alone), and with the contributions of other authors who have come to light in this millennium, especially Antoni García Llorca, with his distinctive command of language and creation of his own universes, Josep Samper's involving and disturbing scenes, Anna Manso's irreverent humor, the tenderness of Pep Molist's tales, and the unhinged adventures of the characters created by Francesc Gisbert and Teresa Broseta.

On the other hand, while authors from the world of adult literature, such as Lolita Bosch, have crossed over happily into that of children's and young adults' literature, other incursions from the professional media (weathermen, television presenters) merit less attention. Normalization can



Cristian Inaraja. *Tres contes de carnaval*

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also be observed in the growing number of awards for original works in Catalan (20 given annually that the magazine *CLIJ* facilitates), largely for narratives, with notable participation by organizations from the Valencia region. Among the most fruitful are the Hospital Sant Joan de Déu Awards, in which a text is submitted and then a jury decides whom to contract for the illustrations. This choice gives added value to titles published by La Galera / Cercle de Lectors which, when taken together, represent an excellent display of the ability of our illustrators. These include Francesc Infante (*El segrest de la primavera*, "The Kidnapping of Spring," 1999); Montse Ginesta (*Adormits*, "Sleepers," 2000); Judit Morales (*I doncs, Pinot*, "So, Pinot," 2001); Mabel Pierola (*Sóc molt Maria*, "I Am Very Maria," 2002);



Infante, Francesc. *El segrest de la primavera*.

Francesc Rovira (*Els patins del Sebastià*, "Sebastian's Skates," 2003); Jordi Vila (*Paper de diari*, "Newspaper Wrapping," 2004); Tha (*L'home del sac*, "The Bag Man," 2005); Gusti (*El nen gris*, "The Grey Boy," 2006); Emilio Urberuaga (*Dos fils*, "Two Sons," 2007), and the only illustrators who work outside Catalonia: Joma (*Per un botó*, "For a Button," 2008) and Arnal Ballester (*En Faiquè*, "Faiquè," 2009).

A good offering for all audiences

The panorama of this decade has been characterized by an increase in titles in the two extreme age ranges of readers: for the very young and for young adults. For first-time readers or for those who cannot yet read, several collections have emerged demonstrating a total mastery of image. These titles deserve special note: *Espais* ("Spaces"), an initiative by La Galera, in which Cristina Losantos profiles in detail some enormous pop-up scenarios; the ingenious brief stories of *Ziu*, written and illustrated by Montse Ginesta; and the peculiar characters of the *Bum-Bums*, created by Luchini, published by Abadia de Montserrat, with the amusing plots of Imma Pla and Montse Ganges. Add to this an endless list of stamped books, fold-out and pop-up books, cloth, plastic, giant or tiny books, those accompanied by CDs or unlikely objects, etc. These books have become popular consumer items.



Ginesta, Montse.
Adormits.

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For young adult readers, the realistic novel continues to dominate the panorama at the hand of authors who deal with topical issues like Dolors García Cornellà and Gemma Pasqual, or tend towards themes of social consciousness like Angels Bogunyà in *Les Veus Protectores* ("The Protective Voices," 2004), or share feminist perspectives such as Gemma Lianas with *El Diari Lila de la Carlota* ("Carlota's Purple Diary," 2001), to name two outstanding works. Following these in the genre ranking are thrillers, although with differing treatments ranging from those close to horror novels to the more usual ones with young investigators or professionals who have to solve a mystery. This includes works by Xavier Vernetta, Xavier Bertran, and Andreu Martín – cultivators

of the noir genre.

There are very few authors who have followed the stellar success of fantasy books in the wake of Harry Potter; one exception is Maite Carranza, who has dared and triumphed with a trilogy about feminist witches with roots in this country (*La Guerra de les Bruixes*, "The War of the Witches," 2005–2007).

The recovery from the Civil War, together with the recent history of the 1960s and 1970s, has generated a considerable number of titles in this current decade, including: Jaume Cela (*El centaure*, "The Centaur," 2004, and *El temps que ens toca viure*, "The Time in Which We Live," 2007), Miquel Rayó (*El camí del far*, "The Lighthouse Path," 2000), J. F. Delgado (*Els llops de la lluna roja*, "The Wolves of the Red Moon," 2002), Gemma Pasqual (*L'últim vaixell*, "The Last Ship," 2004), Andreu Sotorra (*Els silencis de la boca de la mina*, "The Silences of the Mine's Mouth," 2007), and Jordi Sierra i Fabra (*Els focs de la memòria*, "The Fires of Memory," 2008). By contrast, science fiction and adventures are scarce if they are not in a historical context. Montserrat Galicia and Josep Lorman are the points of reference for these two genres.

In the field of illustrated books, the giving of the National Illustration Award to Arnal Ballester and Miquel Calatayud, in 2008 and 2009, respectively, has meant the recognition, not only of the quality and professionalism of both illustrators, but also of this specialization. Despite the continued dominance of foreign titles in publishing, a notable effort is being made to give space to the production of books from Catalan in which illustrations play a principal role. From the harvest of the last few years, highlights include the works of Montse Gisbert (*El segle més nou del món*, "The Newest Century in the World," 2001), *Blananeu* ("Snow White," 2002), a beautiful collection of illustrated books from the now defunct publisher Aura, and *L'Odissea* ("The Odyssey," 2008) by Pep Montserrat. Other notable titles include *Gegantassos i nanets* ("Giants and Dwarves," 2003) by Mabel Pierola, *I ara que ve? Costumari per a nens i nenes* ("What's Coming Now? Routines for Boys and Girls," 2005) by Cristina Losantos, *Vull una corona* ("I Want a Crown," 2005) *Alicia i els país de les meravelles* ("Alice in Wonderland," 2007) by Ignasi Blanch, *Tres contes de carnaval* ("Three Carnival Tales," 2007) by Cristian Inaraja, and more recently *Vet aquí un pèl* ("Once Upon A Time There Was a Hair," 2008) by Marta Balaguer, *La llegenda de sant Jordi* ("The Legend of Saint George," 2008) by Roger Olmos, *El nen perdut* ("The Lost



Losantos, Cristina. *Els campaments*.

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Blanch, Ignasi. *Alicia i el país de les meravelles*.

in books for very young children. They are works that often forget the recreational function of reading in favor of transmitting the message and which are generally not very attractive to readers.

Children's and young adults' literature with a future

The strength and vitality of children's and young adults' literature in Catalan is also evident in other fields beyond publishing. One proof of its normality is the growth in the last few years of research in this area, attributable to the university status of this material. The study and analysis of children's and young adults' literature has been promoted in several universities with excellent results. This includes works generated by the Xarxa Temàtica ("Themed Network") of Catalan children's and young adults' literature made up of researchers from universities in the Catalan area whose work appeared in two publications between 1999 and 2006: *La literatura infantil i juvenil catalana: un segle de canvis* ("Catalan Children's and Young Adults' Literature: A Century of Changes," 2002), an assessment of the development of this material from various angles, and *El patrimoni de la imaginació: Llibres d'ahir per a lectors d'avui* ("The Heritage of the Imagination: Books of Yesterday for Readers of Today," 2005), an analysis of the most representative titles from the history of Catalan children's and young adults' literature. Another interesting contribution to mention is the study commissioned by CljCAT regarding the situation of children's and young adults' books in Catalan (2002), which merits an update.

Likewise, in the past few years, four congresses on Catalan children's and young adults' literature have been held in La Seu d'Urgell (1997), Vilafranca (2001), Valencia (2004), and Mollerussa (2009). These have provided a space for meetings and debates among specialists and have resulted in the publication of works following each gathering. In the throes of the second Congress, two awards were conceived to recognize efforts in dissemination and research in the field of Catalan children's and young adults' literature. These bear the names of two of the field's proponents: the Aurora Díaz Plaja Award is for published articles and the first prize was awarded before the death of the celebrated librarian in 2003, and the Josep Vallverdú Award is given for unpublished studies.

The potential of the digital realm has also increased the presence of children's and young adults' literature as well as the possibility of becoming more informed online through catalogs, reference works, publishing bulletins, digital magazines, etc. There are innumerable blogs on all themes and genres for those wishing to read about, discuss, or review that which is published and those who publish. Particularly notable on the Internet are the digital magazine *Cornabou*, managed by the journalist and critic Andreu Sotorra, and the magazine *Faristol*, in both print and online formats, a CljCAT publication, which is

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celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2010.

Catalan children's and young adults' literature has begun the 21st century with force and dynamism thanks to a rich variety and potent group of publishers, authors, and illustrators who have been able to attract different generations of readers. It can thus be concluded that the publication of children's books in Catalan is abundant in titles, varied in genres and themes, formally correct, and, as a whole, comparable to publication in other countries.

The panorama of Catalan literature for young people is satisfactory, but in this new century

we would certainly like to improve the results in several ways. Future directions will include obtaining wider international renown for our authors and illustrators, increasing production of translations from non-Anglo-Saxon languages and cultures, re-publishing "our" classics to guarantee that Catalan-speaking children know and are able to enjoy certain classics currently out of print, and, of course, achieving greater recognition and depending less on schools alone for support of literature. These are some of the good wishes we have for our field of children's and young adults' literature, as well as for all children's and young adults' literature everywhere.

Notes

1. Children's literature citations can be found at the Fundació Germán Sánchez Ruipérez at <http://www.fundaciongsr.es/catalogos/frames.htm>

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