

CATALAN BOOKS IN FRANKFURT

ANY LANGUAGE BELONGING TO A LIMITED POPULATION HAS DIFFICULTY BREAKING INTO THE GREAT INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHING MARKET.

CARLES-JORDI GUARDIOLA PAST PRESIDENT OF
THE CATALAN-LANGUAGE PUBLISHERS' ASSOCIATION



In October 1982, for the first time in its history, Catalan publishing had a stand to itself at the Frankfurt Book Fair. For the first time, the *Associació d'Editors en Llengua Catalana* managed to overcome the resistance and get the funds which would enable Catalan books to be present in Frankfurt, the great book-fair. All the same it was no easy feat. Traditionally, under the dictatorship of general Franco, the only representation at the Frankfurt Fair was of Castilian books, Castilian culture. When we founded the *Associació d'Editors en Llengua Catalana* in 1978, one of the first things we set out to achieve was, precisely, separate, autonomous participation at the Frankfurt Fair. We started to look for support. No-one said no, but, on the other hand, no-one actually said yes. What we had to do was to present

Catalan publishing independently enough so that no-one could make the mistake of seeing Catalan books as an appendage of Castilian publishing, and, at the same time, we had to find sufficient funds to be able to take part with some dignity. In spite of some unkept promises, in 1982 Catalan books finally made a showing at the Frankfurt Fair with a modest stand financed by the Department of Culture of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*. Since then, we have managed to attend every year, and on each occasion we have introduced improvements: change of site to a better position; changes in the design of the stand after 1983; publication of the catalogue *Books in Catalan* from 1983 on; presentation in 1985 of the German translation of Salvador Espriu's *La pell de brau*, etc. Every year, then, a renewed Catalan presence

at the Frankfurt Fair, already an indispensable reference point for the Catalan publisher.

Nevertheless, our aim at the Frankfurt Fair is not merely to be there each year in improved conditions, but, more than anything else, to make our authors known, to stimulate foreign publishers' interest in our books and negotiate publication rights or sell complete collections, according to each case. In fact, these are the aims of every stand to be found at the Frankfurt Fair. And, of course, for everybody, the most difficult part of the whole story. We have the added disadvantage of having to overcome the barrier of a little —or badly— known language. This is definitely the main "obstacle" in our way, and for that reason we have to use an imaginative and agile strategy.

Any language belonging to a limited population has difficulty in breaking into the great international publishing market. Add to this —also true for other languages of similar characteristics— the fact that Catalan culture and Catalan publishing as such do not have the support of a state to identify them and differentiate them from other cultures and languages, and the question becomes doubly complicated. In this way we come to see that Catalan written culture —mainly expressed through its books— has to fight on the international market in unequal conditions, when it can, and in fact does, offer works of undeniable quality and interest. Catalan publishing, then, becomes doubly unknown: because it corresponds to a country with a relatively small population but also because the country lacks the defining political elements that other cultures have. Perhaps a few examples will help my explanation. Cultures such as

the Danish, the Portuguese, the Hungarian or the Swedish, correspond to countries with similar-sized populations to Catalonia, and in some cases even smaller, and *mutatis mutandis* the development of publishing in those countries is much the same as it is here. However, they are perfectly identifiable and definable cultures and their authors are known or well-known as Danish, Portuguese, Hungarian or Swedish authors. This is not the case with Catalan authors, who have to pay the price of writing in Catalan: that of a limited market and of the lack of knowledge of their work abroad.

Nevertheless, the Catalan publishing world has produced a series of high-quality books and authors and it is only fair that they should be known outside their own country, that they should be translated to other languages. This is not easy, of course. We have to ask all those involved

to make an extra effort: Catalan publishers, Catalan political institutions and the writers and authors themselves. And also, the foreign publishers and agents who might be interested will have to pay careful attention to make sure that the work of unknown authors is not overlooked for other than literary reasons. Always, of course, putting quality before all else: quality has to be the best guarantee of success. I mean this in two ways: Catalan publishers must offer those works which can be of real interest to their foreign counterparts —for their literary, artistic or functional quality— and foreign publishers must demand this quality and publish, if the case arises, not because it is a Catalan author but because it is a *good* Catalan author. Quality alone will open the doors to the world for Catalan authors and books and will also be the best passport to their diffusion. ●

