

ISABEL MARTÍ **Publisher**

Turning the page

After publishing the number one bestseller for Sant Jordi for three years in a row, Isabel Martí of La Campana publishing house reflects on the popular annual spring festival as well as the future of books and the publishing sector

Isabel's book proposals for Sant Jordi

MARCELA TOPOR
After topping three consecutive Sant Jordis, what about this year?

For a publisher like La Campana, which publishes six to eight books a year, it's a great accomplishment. What is even better, is that the books weren't published with this intention. For Sant Jordi, there are so many books published only for the headlines. But La Campana has never done that; we've always tried to produce good books and readers have chosen them for that reason. This is what I'm most satisfied about: doing a good job, though not necessarily commercially. We are taking it easy this year and are not obsessed with being on top. We'll have a book by Josep M^a Espinàs and one by a new author.

It's La Campana's 30th anniversary. What's your evaluation of that time?

I never imagined La Campana would last 30 years. I look back and I'm surprised to see so many books and authors: from Terrabras to Cardús via Xavier Roig (Ni som ni serem, La dictadura de la incompetència), Joan Barril (Un submarí a les estovalles), Porta (Tor), Gabancho (El segle XX a través de les àvies) or Sánchez Piñol (La pell freda and Victus) and Carles Capdevila (Criatura i companyia). Another satisfaction is that our translations have helped the Catalan language, through bestsellers, such

as La petita història dels tractors en ucraïnès, Wonder, L'alegria de viure or L'avi de 100 anys and L'analfabeta, which even surpassed sales in Spanish here. Three years topping sales for Sant Jordi is a gift that not even the most ambitious can dream of. So, thank you booksellers and readers for the confidence. I am now the visible face of La Campana, but with Joana and Anna, and Espinàs, we have shared it all

–**A RITME DEL TEMPS.**

Josep Maria Espinàs publishes his 88th book in his 88th year, a record of participation in the festival.

–**LOCUS.** Antoni Gual records his memories in the vein of the great narrative authors. A book sure to make the reader smile.

–**LA BANDA DE BERLÍN.**

Ernst Haffner has produced a gem about the 1930s, hailed as "one of the season's best books".

–**MOMENTS STEL:LARS.**

Word of mouth has ensured that Joan Bosch now has a healthy following. A book for everyone, men, women, young and old.

–**WONDER I JULIAN.** R J Palacio goes into his third Diada de Sant Jordi well placed to add to his three million book sales.

almost from the beginning. What's more, our team of contributors, such as Imma Falcó, Xavier Pàmies, Marc Sánchez, or Romanyà, give us stability and make us a great team. I never thought that I would feel so accomplished and happy through La Campana. Though it's also true that I have given it my all. I hope that in 30 years' time will be someone here with new ideas and finding new authors.

Is St Jordi too commercial?

I don't like being critical but in a country with the lowest index of readers in Europe, the fact that one of the most important festivals is dedicated to books is nice. It is a day for Catalans and civic feeling, when people fill the streets with a marvellous attitude. Any foreigners who witness it are impressed. I don't agree with those who say Sant Jordi is too commercial. It's a beautiful day and it's worth it, and the sector benefits from it.

It's a festa major for books?

Hundreds of books get published and few recover the investment. If you think in global terms, it's likely that many lose money. But it's balanced and that's good; we have to defend it, so it doesn't get spoilt.

In what sense?

Everybody should have the right to write. This is the richness of a democratic culture. Yet, it is also true that there are media-hungry people doing popular but low quality TV programmes

that encourage bad behaviour. Sant Jordi has always been a day of good behaviour, it is the day when readers talk to authors, not mob them. Do we have to put fences up to stop intruders?

Is this a new phenomenon?

Yes. In the early 1990s, it was something only for Catalan publishers. That lasted until the late '90s, when Spanish publishers realised there was a festival to exploit. Gradually it's becoming more universal, more international and it is being gobbled up by Spanish culture.

What is the percentage of books sold in Catalan?

More or less equal to Spanish. Sales are higher in Spanish because there's more on offer. But if you take Jonas Johansson or Murakami, the sales are equal between Catalan and Spanish, which explains why Spanish publishers that have never dealt with Catalan before are now producing books in Catalan.

Are there fewer readers?

Relatively few people read nowadays; everyone watches TV series. The world is changing. People are educated and trained through computers and the internet. What 500 years ago was telling stories by the fire is now done through TV series, while books remain lost in the middle, and are still losing out thanks to the global trend away from print. I think this has been the trend for the past 10 to 20 years. But humans will always have



Martí heads La Campana, which has topped the Sant Jordi bestsellers the past three years. / ARCHIVE

stories to tell, this has always happened throughout the history of mankind. Now, which format for the stories will come next is anyone's guess. But I do know that we publishers are not eternal and things will change for sure. But I am not afraid of the changes.

How will this change in society affect the book world?

In Spain, we have always had this problem. It has traditionally

been the country that publishes most and reads the least in Europe. There have always been many more books than we can read, and now all the business structures in the world of books tend to reduce, but we are just at the beginning of the change. The role of the editor will also change because distribution is in the hands of a few big companies, such as Amazon, which are making very cheap offers to

attract customers and once they have them, we'll see what happens. We are facing an avalanche of information, so editors will be needed to sort it out, but their role will be important in a different way. Editors will still be needed to find and look after talent, but instead of managing they will become employees. This business cannot exist without creativity and publishers have an executive, creative role

in the sense of choosing writers and giving them advice, I'm just saying that now publishers are at the very top of the books industry, but that maybe in the future it will be the distributors at the top and publishers will become their employees. Power could well move from the hands of editors to those of the distributors.

In this changing context, what should authors do to attract readers?

Have a strong identity, be different and unique and bring a new way of reading the world. These are all still the fundamental factors to becoming success-

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ful in this business, no matter the area. There is too much obsession lately for imitation. We are in touch online so much that we end up being the same in everything: the way we dress, talk and think. It is hard for us to be ourselves any more and we end up being what others want us to be. A distinct personality is always attractive.

What has the crisis brought in terms of trends?

A lot of sex, see the Grey phenomenon, books about the Catalan process, a rediscovery of Catalonia's history, with lots of historical novels. Also trans-generational, crossover books that can be read by a 12 or 90-year old. This is a trend found not just in books, but also in theatre and cinema. Also humour and optimistic books – because of the economic crisis. Also, gastronomy books; just about everybody seems to have a new cookery book out these days.