


## The press as a prescriber of readings. Recommendations of Spanish cultural supplements specialized in literature

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### Abstract

This research aims to study the literary recommendations of the specialized cultural press, which prescribes content and is responsible for setting the cultural agenda. The object of study was the best books lists drawn up at the end of each year by the main cultural supplements of the Spanish written media (*ABC Cultural*, from *ABC*; *Babelia*, from *El País*; *El Cultural*, from *El Mundo*, and *Cultura/s*, from *La Vanguardia*). The analysis period was set between 2010 and 2021 ( $n = 1,286$ ). The results reflect a marked preference of the supplements to include authors of Spanish nationality or, at least, works written in Spanish, although the strength of the United States and English is increasing in the historical series. There is also a clear dominance of the major publishing groups over the independents: in recent years, Planeta and Penguin Random House alone have contributed almost half of the selected works. In addition, the majority are older authors—in fact, more books by deceased authors are recommended than by those under 40 years of age—, with the limitations that this implies for the projection of literature written by young people.

**Keywords:** Literature; journalism; cultural journalism; reading habits; literary criticism; book reviews.

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## La prensa como prescriptora de lecturas. Recomendaciones de los suplementos culturales españoles especializados en literatura

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### Resumen

Esta investigación se propone estudiar las recomendaciones literarias de la prensa cultural especializada, prescriptora de contenidos y responsable de marcar la agenda cultural. Se tomaron como objeto de estudio las listas de mejores libros que confeccionan a finales de cada año los principales suplementos culturales de los medios escritos españoles (*ABC Cultural*, de *ABC*; *Babelia*, de *El País*; *El Cultural*, de *El Mundo*, y *Cultura/s*, de *La Vanguardia*). El periodo de análisis se fijó entre los años 2010 y 2021 ( $n = 1.286$ ). Los resultados reflejan una marcada preferencia de los suplementos por incluir autores de nacionalidad española o, cuando menos, por obras escritas en español, aunque la pujanza de los Estados Unidos y el inglés es cada vez mayor en la serie histórica. Se aprecia también un claro dominio de los grandes sellos y grupos editoriales sobre los independientes: en los últimos años, solo Planeta y Penguin Random House aportan casi la mitad de las obras seleccionadas. Además, son mayoría los autores de edad avanzada —se recomiendan, de hecho, más libros de fallecidos que de menores de 40 años—, con las limitaciones que ello implica a la proyección de la literatura escrita por jóvenes.

**Palabras clave:** Literatura; medios de comunicación; periodismo cultural; hábitos de lectura; crítica literaria; reseñas de libros.

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## Introduction

The cultural supplements of the written press, responsible for reviewing, categorising and ranking the different artistic works published in the national and international sphere, tend to be mostly carried out by cultural journalists, figures inclined to be identified with that of the educator and who serve as a middle ground between the artist and the general public (Hovden and Knapskog, 2015; Kristensen and From, 2015). This role of the cultural journalist is related to the vision of authors such as Bourdieu (1984), who speaks of “intermediaries”, or Janssen and Verboord (2015), who compares this type of professionals with “cultural mediators”.

The fundamental function of cultural journalists lies in filtering the immense number of published works, as well as providing analysis and interpretation that allows readers to delve deeper into the less visible aspects of these works (Roosvall and Widholm, 2018; Riebert et al., 2015; Barei, 1999; Moreno, 1994). In short, cultural journalists take the form of content prescribers, this being one of the main characteristics that differentiate them from other areas of journalistic specialisation, as they select and amplify, through generally mass media, the scope of certain cultural products.

The image of the cultural journalist has historically been discredited by the fact that their functions fall under the umbrella of “soft news”, a step below what is considered “real journalism”, which is embodied by political information or information directly related to the public interest, so that cultural issues have been relegated to a secondary level within the journalistic hierarchy. Although, according to Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007), the task of cultural journalists implies an important degree of commitment to improving the general appreciation of arts from the public, this attribution has sometimes been linked to the commodification and even tabloidisation of information, as the role of prescriber can affect habits of readers and determine their consumption patterns, thus intertwining professional work and the economic interests of the cultural industries (Hanusch, 2017, 2012; Hovden and Knapskog, 2015; Reinemann et al., 2011; Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007).

However, culture is considered to be one of the areas of specialisation that receive the least pressure from their company, and even where their professionals have more material and time resources to carry out their contributions. However, Carrasco-Molina and García-Borrego (2020) identify, in line with the contributions of Hovden and Kristensen (2021), that the personal circle can lead to a certain bias when conducting some analyses, which distances criticism—the journalistic genre par excellence of the cultural press, unique in this area of specialisation—from the purely artistic criteria to which it should be subjected. This is related to another factor implicit in the very nature of cultural journalism that provokes misgivings in other areas: the subjectivism that must necessarily be incurred when carrying out a critique (Chong, 2017).

Although cultural journalists are usually considered as a compact and uniform group, the careers and professional status of those who perform these critical tasks can vary greatly. In the Spanish context, Carrasco-Molina and García-Borrego (2020) distinguish between “insiders”, journalists trained in the field of communication and part of the traditional editorial team, and “outsiders”, coming from the literary medium, multifaceted and with an education linked to the humanities.

Despite the fact that there is no lack of criticism, both in Spain and in Europe—not necessarily well-founded, as shown in the work of Hovden and Kristensen (2021)—regarding conflicts of interest, endogamy or the deformation of their professional work (Garbisu, 2019; Muñoz-Fernández, 2017; Martínez-Fresneda, 2011; Ruano, 2009; Rivas-Troitiño, 2006; Rebollo,

2000; Vallejo-Mejía, 1993), the historical disdain for cultural journalism has recently been shifting towards better consideration, as seen in works from Nordic countries, where the perception of educator enjoys a high social reputation (Kristensen, 2019; Kristensen and Riegert, 2017; Kristensen and From, 2015; Hovden and Knapskog, 2015; Giddens, 1992). Recent years have seen an increase in the academic appeal of cultural journalism, as sociologically it can serve as a means of studying cultural transformations in a community (Kristensen, 2019; Janssen et al., 2011; Janssen et al., 2008). Likewise, the cultural supplements of major newspapers, where these journalists participate to a greater extent, are essential tools of cultural valorisation to legitimise major authors and their artistic productions (Kristensen, 2019; Purhonen et al., 2019; Yaren and Hazir, 2018; Janssen and Verboord, 2015).

### *Cultural journalism and literary canon*

In this work of hierarchisation undertaken by the cultural supplements, it is interesting to separate, as Dueñas et al. (2014) propose, the “social canon” from the “academic canon”. While the academic canon is legitimised by academic bodies, and its components are considered to be high literature, the social canon is made up of “la selección de lecturas que viene dictada directamente por instancias sociales, ya sean las propias editoriales a través de sus variados modos de promoción o los círculos de proximidad del lector (amigos, familia), siempre un tanto al margen de las recomendaciones legitimadas desde el sistema educativo” (p. 29). The recommendations of these lists of best books form part of the social canon, as they are not corroborated by academic bodies and are based on the subjectivity of the jury, with a final destination of dissemination to press readers, as a kind of assistance in the filter of reading selection. Nor should the notion of canon be confused with that of classics, as classics usually appear within the canon, but there are canons that do not focus on the most influential classics in a given period and society, even if they end up occupying the position of classic author or work (Cerrillo, 2013; Servén-Díez, 2008).

The notion of canon has been transformed over the course of literary history, and several authors have pointed out some of the shortcomings present in the construction of these canons: on the one hand, there has been a struggle against their hermeticism, which continues to produce lists of eminently male members, where the novel genre predominates (Tovar-González, 2023); on the other, new technologies in the issuing of criticism, and in the way of reading and producing, which should have a key impact on the construction of the canon, have not been taken into account (Casiano, 2022). The number of publications on the debate of the canon is rising, and, as evidenced by previous studies, they focus their efforts on questioning a selection of the best writers and works that systematically excludes important sectors of the literary universe, and that has failed to consider crucial changes in culture and in social or power structures (Camo-Vidal and Sánchez-Aparicio, 2022).

The study of reading habits has gained importance in recent years, and scientific production has advanced notably. As reflected in the report of the Federation of Publishers’ Guilds (FGEE) in 2021, 64.4% of the Spanish population reads books for leisure, in their free time; an increase from the 57.9% obtained in the 2011 reports. Research on reading habits tends to focus on the creation and promotion of these habits, which seems to be having consequences in the results offered by the FGEE. In the creation of reading habits, normally studied in the field of teaching and pedagogy for children, it is assumed that this task should be assigned to the family and the educational system (Fernández-Blanco et al., 1999), intermediary institutions that have been superseded as regulators of what should be read (Alcocer-Vázquez and Zapata-González, 2021).

Authors such as Caride et al. (2018) call on sociocultural mediators, cultural managers, librarians... to participate in the development of reading habits in a public that ranges from childhood to old age. The role of the cultural journalist as mediator has been mentioned above, who also plays an important role in the development of reading habits, such as the ranking of works chosen by a reader on the basis of lists of the best books. Moreover, the public characterised as regular newspaper readers shares numerous traits with frequent book readers (Fernández-Blanco et al., 1999), which means that, through these cultural supplements, readers move from the journalistic to the literary medium.

So far, the volume of publications on the chosen object of study –literary recommendations in the specialised cultural press– is small. Only recently has it been observed that women writers enjoy minimal space in the supplements of reference, despite the fact that there is a trend towards parity in several of the main titles, or that authors from the main publishing centres (Madrid and Barcelona) are over-represented compared to the rest of the country and, above all, peripheral Spain (García-Borrego and García-Cardona, 2021; García-Borrego, Gómez-Calderón and García-Cardona, 2022). On the other hand, there are no academic studies on aspects such as nationality, language, publisher, publishing group or age.

## Objectives

This study sets out to examine the reading recommendations of the main Spanish cultural supplements, in an attempt to recognise the characteristics and differences in the literary prescriptions made by the press of reference. Four central objectives were established for this purpose. Firstly, this work aims to determine which are the main nationalities recommended in the different cultural supplements, as well as the language in which the selected works are written (O1). Secondly, to describe the editorial distribution of the works, in order to detect whether there is any relationship of preference between independent publishers and those belonging to large groups or conglomerates (O2). Thirdly, to trace the demographic profile of the writers according to their age in the year in which their works were chosen (O3). And finally, to determine the common and differentiating features of the recommendations of the four major cultural supplements of the Spanish press (O4).

## Methodology

This research uses the technique of content analysis as a method of data collection. To this end, a file has been applied to the best books lists of the main cultural supplements in the Spanish press: *El Cultural*, from *El Mundo*; *Babelia* from *El País*; *ABC Cultural*, from *ABC* and *Cultura/s* from *La Vanguardia*. These lists usually come out at the end of the year and select the best works published in the last 12 months. This repertoire necessarily forms a work of hierarchisation and canonisation, affirming that these are the highest quality works written during the year.

The lists that appeared between 2010 and 2021 were analysed, located through the newspaper library of each medium, databases, and alternative repositories such as *MyNews* and physical archives from libraries. Ultimately, a record of 1,286 literary works was reached, spread over a study period of more than a decade, as shown in table 1. Only the best books lists from the supplements *Cultura/s*, in the years 2010 and 2011, and *ABC Cultural*, in the years 2010 and 2015, could not be retrieved.

**Table 1. Books analysed by supplements each year (2010-2021)**

	<i>Babelia</i>	<i>Cultura/s</i>	<i>El Cultural</i>	<i>ABC Cultural</i>	Total	%
2010	29	0	25	0	54	4.2%
2011	25	0	25	12	62	4.8%
2012	20	30	30	13	93	7.2%
2013	20	30	25	13	88	6.8%
2014	20	20	30	13	83	6.5%
2015	20	30	47	0	97	7.5%
2016	20	30	45	25	120	9.3%
2017	20	30	45	23	118	9.2%
2018	50	30	35	22	137	10.7%
2019	50	45	45	6	146	11.4%
2020	50	30	50	5	135	10.5%
2021	50	30	50	23	153	11.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>1.286</b>	
%	29.1%	23.7%	35.1%	12.1%		

In order to determine the characteristics of the literary recommendations, the main attributes of the work to be measured were established *ad hoc*, relating both to the author and to the publication itself, ensuring that these were objective and non-discretionary to guarantee the reliability of the observations. The resulting analysis sheet contained the following variables:

- Name of the supplement. Computed as a nominal variable with four options (*Babelia*, *El Cultural*, *ABC Cultural*, *Cultura/s*).
- Year of publication of the list of best books. Ordinal variable with twelve values (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021).
- Nationality of authors. Nominal variable with *ad hoc* categories for each country listed, with a total of 57 at the end of data collection (from Albania to Venezuela, alphabetically).
- Language. Nominal variable indicating the language in which the literary work is written. All 26 languages listed have been included (from Albanian to Yiddish, alphabetically).
- Publisher. Nominal variable that records the publishers of the chosen books. A total of 171 publishers have been included whose publications appear in the lists (from Abada to Visor, alphabetically).
- Group. Computed as a nominal variable, it includes the clusters or groups under which the publishers studied above are found. A total of 15 groups have been identified, as well as an additional category encompassing independent publishers (from Anaya to Unidad Editorial, alphabetically).
- Age. An ordered scale variable that includes the age of the author of each work selected in the lists of best books, taking as a reference the 31st of December of the corresponding year.



## Results

### *Nationality of authors and language of literary works*

The data in table 2 show how authors of Spanish nationality predominate over the rest. However, there are notable differences between the supplements. While in *Babelia* and *ABC Cultural* Spanish writers represent less than half —37.4% and 43.9% respectively—, in *Cultura/s* they reach 53.4% and in *El Cultural* 61.7%. There is a difference of 24.3 points between *Babelia*, the supplement that includes the fewest Spanish authors, and *El Cultural*, the medium that introduces the most (60.2% more). The second nation with the highest share of authors is the United States, which ranges from 10.6% in *El Cultural* to 20.6% in *Babelia*. It occupies this position in all four supplements, while the third position seems to be more disputed: for some it is the United Kingdom (*El Cultural* and *ABC Cultural*) and for others France (*Babelia* and *El Cultural*). Latin American countries do not enter the scene until position number 5, with Argentina, which shows a maximum of 6.1% in *Babelia* and less than 5% in the rest of the supplements, and Mexico, in position number 9, with a maximum of 2.7% in *Babelia*. Europe accumulates 76.8% of the total number of works, well ahead of North America (18.2%) in all titles, which in turn is more than twice as many books as its South American neighbours (7.4%), who together are even below countries such as the United Kingdom (7.6%).

It should also be noted that *Babelia* is the supplement most open to different nationalities, including up to 42 different nationalities in the period in question, while the others range from 29 for *ABC Cultural* to 36 for *El Cultural*.

**Table 2. Distribution of books by nationality of authors and supplement**

Country / Continent	n	<i>Babelia</i>	<i>Cultura/s</i>	<i>El Cultural</i>	<i>ABC Cultu.</i>	Total
1 Spain	650	37.4%	53.4%	61.7%	43.9%	50.5%
2 United States	196	20.6%	13.4%	10.6%	19.4%	15.2%
3 United Kingdom	98	7.8%	6.2%	8.8%	6.5%	7.6%
4 France	84	8.6%	6.9%	5.1%	5.2%	6.5%
5 Argentina	53	6.1%	4.3%	2.7%	3.2%	4.1%
6 Germany	34	2.9%	2.3%	1.8%	5.2%	2.6%
7 Canada	21	1.9%	2.0%	0.9%	2.6%	1.6%
8 Poland	19	2.4%	0.3%	1.5%	1.3%	1.5%
9 Mexico	17	2.7%	1.0%	0.0%	2.6%	1.3%
10 Italy	16	1.6%	1.3%	0.9%	1.3%	1.2%
– Other countries	178	17.6%	12.8%	11.3%	14.2%	13.8%
1 Europe	<b>988</b>	<b>69.0%</b>	<b>78.0%</b>	<b>84.1%</b>	<b>72.3%</b>	<b>76.8%</b>
2 North America	<b>234</b>	<b>25.1%</b>	<b>16.4%</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>24.5%</b>	<b>18.2%</b>
3 South America	<b>95</b>	<b>11.2%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>	<b>7.4%</b>
4 Asia	<b>25</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>1.9%</b>
5 Central America	<b>11</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>
6 Africa	<b>7</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>
7 Oceania	<b>5</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>

Country / Continent	n	<i>Babelia</i>	<i>Cultura</i> s	<i>El Cultural</i>	<i>ABC Cultu.</i>	Total
Variety		42	33	36	29	58
% of total		72.4%	56.9%	62.1%	50.0%	

From a diachronic perspective, there is a clear decrease in the ratio of authors of Spanish nationality over the years, as reflected in table 3. From 2010 to 2021, it decreases 37.3%, or 24.9 points (from 66.7% to 41.8%). The transition occurs between 2013 and 2016, when it drops from 70.5% to 38.3%: slightly more than half. In contrast, there is a progressive growth in the United States, which starts with 5.6% of authors of this nationality in 2010 and rises to 19.6% in 2021, almost tripling the initial proportion. The rest of the nationalities do not show a clear upward or downward trend, with cyclical fluctuations depending on the year studied.

The phenomenon observed in the countries is replicated in the continents, with Europe losing up to 21.4% of its hegemony between 2010 and 2021 (from 88.9% to 69.9%) and North America tripling its hegemony (from 7.4% to 21.6%), while no clear patterns are observed in the rest of the regions. The number of countries with representation has grown in the years studied, in line with the increase in the number of selected works.

**Table 3. Distribution of the books by nationality of the author and year (2010-2021)**

	n	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Spain</b>	650	66.7%	59.7%	65.6%	70.5%	55.4%	45.4%	38.3%	42.4%	46.7%	49.3%	50.4%	41.8%
<b>United States</b>	196	5.6%	12.9%	7.5%	8.0%	9.6%	14.4%	19.2%	16.1%	19.7%	15.8%	20.0%	19.6%
<b>United Kingdom</b>	98	5.6%	6.5%	6.5%	4.5%	4.8%	12.4%	8.3%	8.5%	8.0%	8.2%	6.7%	8.5%
<b>France</b>	84	3.7%	3.2%	3.2%	3.4%	10.8%	9.3%	10.0%	4.2%	5.8%	6.8%	5.2%	9.2%
<b>Argentina</b>	53	5.6%	3.2%	4.3%	1.1%	6.0%	7.2%	5.8%	5.1%	3.6%	4.8%	2.2%	2.0%
<b>Germany</b>	34	3.7%	4.8%	2.2%	3.4%	0.0%	2.1%	7.5%	4.2%	0.0%	1.4%	2.2%	2.0%
<b>Canada</b>	21	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	3.4%	1.2%	0.0%	0.8%	1.7%	3.6%	2.1%	3.0%	0.7%
<b>Poland</b>	19	0.0%	1.6%	1.1%	0.0%	2.4%	1.0%	1.7%	0.8%	0.7%	4.1%	1.5%	1.3%
<b>Mexico</b>	17	1.9%	1.6%	3.2%	1.1%	2.4%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	1.5%	0.7%	1.5%	1.3%
<b>Italy</b>	16	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	2.1%	1.7%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%	1.5%	2.0%
<b>Other countries</b>	178	20.4%	12.9%	10.8%	12.5%	14.5%	12.4%	9.2%	19.5%	14.6%	11.0%	11.9%	18.3%
<b>Europe</b>	988	88.9%	87.1%	86.0%	86.4%	80.7%	78.4%	71.7%	72.0%	74.5%	75.3%	71.9%	69.9%
<b>North America</b>	234	7.4%	14.5%	11.8%	12.5%	13.3%	14.4%	21.7%	17.8%	24.8%	18.5%	24.4%	21.6%
<b>South America</b>	95	9.3%	6.5%	5.4%	9.1%	8.4%	8.2%	7.5%	6.8%	5.8%	8.9%	5.2%	8.5%
<b>Asia</b>	25	3.7%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	2.4%	3.1%	1.7%	1.7%	1.5%	1.4%	2.2%	3.9%
<b>Central America</b>	11	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	1.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%	0.0%	2.2%	0.7%
<b>Africa</b>	7	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%
<b>Oceania</b>	5	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	1.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Variety</b>		17	17	19	18	19	19	21	26	25	22	21	27



	n	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
% of total		29.3%	29.3%	32.8%	31.0%	32.8%	32.8%	36.2%	44.8%	43.1%	37.9%	36.2%	46.6%

As for the languages used in the books, the crosstabs of variables shown in table 4 indicate a comfortable predominance of books in Spanish in the four supplements, although *El Cultural* achieves levels of 67.0% compared to the minimum of 37.7% in *Cultura/s* (43.7% less). English is the second language after Spanish, with a maximum of 30.7% in *Babelia* and a minimum of 20.6% in *El Cultural*. French gains importance in the supplements *Cultura/s* and *Babelia*, both above 7%, but loses strength in *El Cultural* and *ABC Cultural*, being surpassed in the latter supplement by German, with 6.5% of the total.

The case of *Cultura/s*, which belongs to *La Vanguardia*, presents a peculiarity that distinguishes it from the rest: its commitment to literature in Catalan (22.0% of the recommendations), almost on a par with English (23.3%), as opposed to the rest of the supplements in which this language does not reach 1%, or even 0.0%, as is the case of *ABC Cultural*.

**Table 4. Distribution of books by language and supplement**

Language	n	<i>Babelia</i>	<i>Cultura/s</i>	<i>El Cultural</i>	<i>ABC Cultu.</i>	Total
1 Spanish	677	47.9%	37.7%	67.0%	51.6%	52.6%
2 English	324	30.7%	23.3%	20.6%	29.0%	25.2%
3 French	81	7.8%	7.2%	4.6%	5.8%	6.3%
4 Catalan	71	0.8%	22.0%	0.2%	0.0%	5.5%
5 German	42	4.5%	2.6%	1.5%	6.5%	3.3%
6 Italian	15	1.6%	1.0%	0.9%	1.3%	1.2%
Other languages	74	6.7%	6.2%	5.1%	4.5%	5.8%
Variety		19	20	18	10	27
% of total		70.4%	74.1%	66.7%	37.0%	

The study of the historical series allows us to detect changes of great interest over the eleven years covered by this research, as shown in table 5. The dominance of Spanish in 2010 is overwhelming, with 74.1% of the works selected, with English books in second place with 14.8%. Over the years, there has been a notable decline in the former: from accounting for three out of four of the best books of the year, by the end of the period studied the figure is down to two out of four (48.4% of the total): literature written in Spanish has thus declined by 34.1% in eleven years. The opposite trend is observed for English, which nearly doubles in the period under study: from 14.8% of books in 2010, it rises to 28.8% in 2021. The rest of the languages do not show a clear propensity in either direction.

**Table 5. Distribution of books by language and year (2010-2021)**

	n	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Spanish	677	74.1%	67.7%	61.3%	65.9%	63.9%	46.4%	43.3%	46.6%	46.7%	45.9%	51.9%	48.4%
English	324	14.8%	14.5%	16.1%	13.6%	15.7%	23.7%	30.8%	30.5%	33.6%	26.7%	31.1%	28.8%

	n	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>French</b>	81	3.7%	4.8%	4.3%	4.5%	10.8%	9.3%	9.2%	3.4%	5.1%	6.8%	4.4%	7.8%
<b>Catalan</b>	71	0.0%	0.0%	10.8%	8.0%	0.0%	7.2%	5.0%	5.1%	4.4%	11.0%	5.2%	3.9%
<b>German</b>	42	5.6%	4.8%	2.2%	3.4%	0.0%	2.1%	5.8%	5.9%	3.6%	2.1%	1.5%	3.3%
<b>Italian</b>	15	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	2.1%	0.8%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%	1.5%	2.0%
<b>Other languages</b>	74	1.9%	6.5%	5.4%	3.4%	9.6%	9.3%	3.3%	8.5%	2.9%	7.5%	4.4%	5.9%
<b>Variety</b>		6	9	11	10	10	14	10	12	11	12	11	13
<b>% of total</b>		22.2%	33.3%	40.7%	37.0%	37.0%	51.9%	37.0%	44.4%	40.7%	44.4%	40.7%	48.1%

### Publishing groups and companies of the selected books

As detailed in table 6, Anagrama is the publisher par excellence for three of the four cultural supplements (12.6% of the total number of best books). It has a higher proportion in *Babelia* with 15.2%, while in *ABC Cultural* it only reaches 5.2%, below Seix Barral and Alfaguara and on a par with Galaxia Gutenberg. It is Seix Barral, precisely, the publisher that appears in second place (7.2% of recommended works), with a greater presence also in *Babelia* (7.8%). *El Cultural* seems to opt for works published by Tusquets to a greater extent, while *ABC Cultural*, when it comes to compiling the lists, is particularly committed to Alfaguara, whose case is paradigmatic: between 2010 and 2014, works by this publisher accounted for 9.3% on average in the four supplements, but the figure drops to 4.3% in the period 2015-2021, shortly after its sale from PRISA to Penguin Random House materialised. In any case, the four major publishers (Anagrama, Seix Barral, Tusquets and Alfaguara) account for 32.7% of the total number of works selected; the remaining 62.8% is distributed among 167 other publishers. *ABC Cultural* is, in this sense, the supplement that most distributes its recommendations among the smaller publishers (only 23.9% of the works cited are published by the four major publishers), while *Babelia* shows a greater preference for best sellers (37.2%).

Table 6. Distribution of books by publishing house and supplement

Editorial	n	<i>Babelia</i>	<i>Cultura/s</i>	<i>El Cultural</i>	<i>ABC Cultu.</i>	Total
1 Anagrama	162	15.2%	14.8%	11.5%	5.2%	12.6%
2 Seix Barral	92	7.8%	7.2%	6.9%	6.5%	7.2%
3 Tusquets	89	7.5%	4.9%	8.4%	5.2%	6.9%
4 Alfaguara	77	6.7%	5.2%	5.5%	7.1%	6.0%
5 Galaxia Gutenberg	49	1.9%	4.6%	4.4%	5.2%	3.8%
6 Random House	40	3.7%	3.9%	2.2%	2.6%	3.1%
7 Acantilado	38	2.9%	2.3%	3.5%	2.6%	3.0%
8 Debate	34	2.4%	1.0%	4.2%	1.9%	2.6%
9 Galaxia G./Círculo L.	33	4.0%	0.7%	2.9%	1.9%	2.6%
10 Salamandra	31	1.6%	4.3%	1.3%	3.9%	2.4%
11 Taurus	31	3.7%	0.7%	2.7%	1.9%	2.4%
12 Visor	31	1.9%	0.0%	4.4%	2.6%	2.4%

Editorial	n	Babelia	Cultura/s	El Cultural	ABC Cultu.	Total
13 Libros del Asteroide	28	2.4%	2.3%	1.8%	2.6%	2.2%
Big-4	420	37.2%	32.1%	32.3%	23.9%	32.7%
Others (not Big-4)	710	62.8%	67.9%	67.7%	76.1%	67.3%
Variety		73	80	77	67	171
% of total		42.7%	46.8%	45.0%	39.2%	

When studying the groups in which the different publishers fall into, it can be appreciated, as shown in table 7, that in the four supplements, independent publishers (42.1% of the total) are above each of the main groups individually, but not as a whole (57.9%). *ABC Cultural* is the one that shows the greatest preference for independent publishers, with 48.4%, while *El Cultural* is least inclined to publishers outside business conglomerates (37.4%). Planeta is the leading group in terms of representation within the four supplements (24.4%), with a higher proportion in *El Cultural* (28.1%) and *Cultura/s* (28.5%) than in *Babelia* (19.8%) or *ABC Cultural* (16.8%). In second place comes the Penguin Random House group (15.6%), whose works are selected to a greater extent by *Babelia* (18.2%) and *ABC Cultural* (16.1%). PRISA, the group that includes *El País* and therefore *Babelia*, is better supported by this supplement than by the rest, although the differences are not very significant (3.7%, compared to 3.2% for *ABC Cultural*, 3.1% for *El Cultural* and 1.6% for *Cultura/s*).

Table 7. Distribution of books by publishing group and supplement

Publishing group	n	Babelia	Cultura/s	El Cultural	ABC Cultu.	Total
1 Independent	542	40.9%	47.5%	37.4%	48.4%	42.1%
2 Planeta	314	19.8%	28.5%	28.1%	16.8%	24.4%
3 Penguin R. H.	200	18.2%	14.1%	14.2%	16.1%	15.6%
4 Feltrinelli	156	14.4%	14.8%	10.8%	5.2%	12.1%
5 Anaya	49	1.9%	2.3%	5.5%	6.5%	3.8%
6 PRISA	38	3.7%	1.6%	3.1%	3.2%	3.0%
Planeta + Penguin	514	38.0%	42.6%	42.3%	32.9%	40.0%
Others	840	62.0%	57.4%	57.7%	67.1%	60.0%
Variety		10	12	8	11	16
% of total		62.5%	75.0%	50.0%	68.8%	

Table 8 shows that independent publishers are chosen to a greater extent in 2010 (59.3%) than in 2021 (44.4%), a difference of 24.2% or 14.9 points. However, this trend does not appear to be constant over the years, as is the case with the two large groups, Planeta and Penguin Random House: the former goes from 9.3% in 2010 to 22.9% in 2021, an increase of 146.2% in eleven years; the latter rises significantly from 7.4% in 2010 to 20.3% in 2021, with a growth of 174.3%. Together, the two groups have risen from 16.7% of the selected works in 2010 to 43.1% in 2021, and with this upward trend in several years they have come close to accounting for up to half of the best books according to the media.

**Table 8. Distribution of books by publishing group and year (2010-2021)**

GROUP	n	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Independent</b>	542	59.3%	46.8%	36.6%	38.6%	43.4%	34.0%	43.3%	48.3%	46.0%	32.2%	42.2%	44.4%
<b>Planeta</b>	314	9.3%	19.4%	26.9%	29.5%	26.5%	19.6%	23.3%	27.1%	22.6%	26.0%	30.4%	22.9%
<b>Penguin RH</b>	200	7.4%	6.5%	8.6%	6.8%	20.5%	17.5%	17.5%	9.3%	19.7%	21.2%	17.0%	20.3%
<b>Feltrinelli</b>	156	0.0%	6.5%	5.4%	17.0%	10.8%	21.6%	15.0%	11.9%	8.8%	17.8%	9.6%	12.4%
<b>Anaya</b>	49	5.6%	1.6%	4.3%	2.3%	1.2%	8.2%	0.8%	6.8%	4.4%	4.1%	3.7%	2.6%
<b>PRISA</b>	38	13.0%	16.1%	12.9%	10.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Planeta+Penguin</b>	514	16.7%	25.8%	35.5%	36.4%	47.0%	37.1%	40.8%	36.4%	42.3%	47.3%	47.4%	43.1%
<b>Others</b>	840	83.3%	74.2%	64.5%	63.6%	53.0%	62.9%	59.2%	63.6%	57.7%	52.7%	52.6%	56.9%
<b>Variety</b>		7	8	8	9	7	9	8	6	9	8	7	8
<b>% of total</b>		43.8%	50.0%	50.0%	56.3%	43.8%	56.3%	50.0%	37.5%	56.3%	50.0%	43.8%	50.0%

Feltrinelli, on the other hand, thanks to Anagrama, achieves a certain relevance over the years, reaching 12.4% in 2021, as it had 0% of recommended works in 2010. Anaya and PRISA, unlike other groups, show a decline over the period studied: Anaya falls by less than half between 2010 and 2021 (from 5.6% to 2.6%), and PRISA disappears from 2014 onwards.

### Age of authors

Finally, it is worth reviewing the age profile of the recommended authors. The first data shown in table 9 is their average age, 58.5, with oscillations of less than three years between supplements: *Cultura/s* has the lowest average age, at 55.8, while *ABC Cultural* is over sixty (60.2). If we also include deceased writers, it is *ABC Cultural* itself which tends to include them to a greater extent, with 26.5% of deceased writers on its lists, which represents slightly more than one out of every four authors recommended. In *El Cultural* and *Cultura/s*, on the other hand, to find a deceased writer you must increase the count to 25 (4.6% and 4.2% of recommendations, respectively). In terms of age ranges, authors aged 35 or less represent a small part of the sample (3.7%), and there are, in fact, more writers in the 76-80 age bracket alone (4.8%) than under 35. The range with the highest number of individuals is the one between 61 and 65 (12.6%), where the highest percentage of authors is observed in almost all the supplements (*Babelia* 12.8%; *Cultura/s* 13.4%; *El Cultural* 12.8%; *ABC Cultural* 9.7%). Only two other age groups come close to this peak, namely the one immediately before (10.6% between 56 and 60) and the one immediately after (10.4% between 66 and 70).

**Table 9. Age of authors in 5-year ranges according to the supplement**

	<i>Babelia</i>	<i>Cultura/s</i>	<i>El Cultural</i>	<i>ABC Cultu.</i>	Total
<b>Average age (alive)</b>	59.9	55.8	58.8	60.2	58.5
<b>Median (alive)</b>	60	56	59	60	58
<b>Minimum</b>	25	26	26	35	25
<b>Maximum</b>	101	89	98	97	101
<b># of deceased</b>	48	14	19	41	122

	<i>Babelia Cultura/s El Cultural ABC Cultu.</i>				Total
<b>% of deceased</b>	12.8%	4.6%	4.2%	26.5%	9.5%
<b>Up to 30</b>	1.3%	2.6%	1.8%	0.0%	1.6%
<b>31-35</b>	1.9%	2.6%	2.2%	1.3%	2.1%
<b>36-40</b>	4.5%	8.2%	4.6%	3.2%	5.3%
<b>41-45</b>	7.8%	10.2%	7.7%	8.4%	8.4%
<b>46-50</b>	9.4%	11.5%	9.7%	5.8%	9.6%
<b>51-55</b>	8.6%	11.5%	10.8%	9.0%	10.1%
<b>56-60</b>	10.2%	11.1%	11.9%	6.5%	10.6%
<b>61-65</b>	12.8%	13.4%	12.8%	9.7%	12.6%
<b>66-70</b>	9.1%	8.9%	13.1%	9.0%	10.4%
<b>71-75</b>	6.4%	6.9%	8.0%	4.5%	6.8%
<b>76-80</b>	5.9%	3.3%	5.3%	3.9%	4.8%
<b>81-85</b>	3.7%	2.6%	3.1%	1.3%	3.0%
<b>86-90</b>	2.7%	1.3%	1.1%	1.9%	1.7%
<b>91-95</b>	0.8%	0.0%	0.2%	1.9%	0.5%
<b>96-100</b>	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%	0.6%	0.2%
<b>More than 100</b>	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%

The apparent preference for older writers is underlined by other data: 9.5% of the recommended authors are deceased, and 9.0% are 40 years old or younger. In other words: more deceased writers are recommended than younger ones. In the specific case of *ABC Cultural* – which chooses not to include any author under 35– there are more deceased authors than under 54. The youngest author is 25 years of age (the Spanish Andrea Abreu, for *Panza de burro*); the oldest, 101 (the German-Dutch Hans Keilson for *La muerte del adversario*). In overall terms, the age that contributes the highest percentage to the total is 70, with 3.2% of the total, which means that more writers exactly 70 years of age are recommended than those under 34 (2.8%).

## Conclusions

The main objective of this research is to determine the type of literary recommendations made by cultural supplements through the best books lists published at the end of the year. Firstly, the nationality of the authors included in these lists and the language in which their literary works are written (O1) were studied. The first conclusion is that books by Spanish writers have priority over the rest, although this predominance is observed to a greater extent in some supplements than in others: *El Cultural*, from *El Mundo*, shows 61.7% compared to *Babelia*, from *El País*, with 37.4%. It is possible that the ideological tendency of the press in which they are framed has had an influence, and that is why the supplement of *El Mundo* focuses more on national authors and *Babelia*, from *El País* seems to have a more internationalist perspective. This rule would not apply to *ABC Cultural*, whose profile coincides more with *Babelia* than with *El Cultural*. *Cultura/s* from *La Vanguardia*, for its part, operates in other coordinates due to the important nuance of language, as will be explained below.

According to the diachronic analysis, the presence of Spanish writers has decreased by 34.1% between 2010 and 2021 in the four supplements; in general, there seems to be a greater predilection in recent years for exploring literary novelties from abroad. However, the country that best lends itself to these incursions is the United States: works written by its authors systematically occupy second place in all the supplements, where they already reach 20% of the recommendations every year—quadrupling the 5.6% that was noted at the beginning of the study period, in 2010—, beginning to act as a reference for the national press and showing a cultural power that is usual in other disciplines such as cinema but which, until now, had not been demonstrated in the field of literature.

In linguistic terms, as with nationality, Spanish once again dominates, with 52.6% of the total number of books selected. It should be noted that, unlike the previous variable, literature in Spanish includes Spanish-speaking authors from all over the world, and all works by Spanish authors written in another language (Catalan, Basque, Galician, etc.) are excluded. *El Cultural* (67%) and *ABC Cultural* (51.6%), of a more conservative tendency, are the ones that recommend the most literature in Spanish, while *Babelia* is committed to works in other languages, limiting Spanish to less than half (47.9%). *Cultura/s* (37.7%) has the lowest proportion of works in Spanish, due to the commitment to Catalan of *La Vanguardia*, with sections in its lists devoted exclusively to literature in this language. Works in Catalan make up 22.0% of the total in *Cultura/s*, but less than 1% in the rest of the supplements: even so, it is up to four times more common to find books in Catalan in *Babelia*, of the progressive daily *El País*, than in *El Cultural*, of the conservative *El Mundo*. In *ABC Cultural*, meanwhile, not a single work written in Catalan is recommended.

English is the second preferred language in the recommendations, especially for *Babelia* (30.7%) and *ABC Cultural* (29.0%), which once again highlights the influence of its two great ambassadors, the United States and the United Kingdom. French, the third language, a long way behind English, seems to receive considerably more attention from *Babelia* and *Cultura/s* than from *El Cultural* and *ABC Cultural*, which again may be due to the editorial lines of each title and the historical ties between Spain and France.

Regarding the publishers and business groups to which they belong (O2), the predominance of Anagrama in three of the four supplements is clear, which seems to place it as the publisher of reference. The difference is notable with the three publishers that follow it (Seix Barral, Tusquets and Alfaguara), which in turn mark a wide distance from the rest. Of interest is the case of the last one, Alfaguara, whose average from 2010 to 2014 (9.3%) decreases to 4.3% between 2015 and 2021. The year 2014 seems to be the turning point, in which recommendations under the Alfaguara brand are ostensibly reduced (*Babelia* goes from 9.0% to 0%; the same happens with *El Cultural*, which decreases from 9.6% to 0%), just after its sale from PRISA to the Penguin Random House group.

As far as publishing groups are concerned, Planeta and Penguin Random House are at the top of the lists of the four supplements: Planeta encompasses two of the publishers that contribute the most works (Seix Barral and Tusquets), in addition to other publishers also widely represented in the lists (Deusto, Destino, Espasa...), and Penguin Random House comprises another of the four main publishers (Alfaguara), along with others with somewhat more modest representation (Random House, Salamandra, Taurus...). Their growth, moreover, has been sustained, tripling its digits between 2010 and 2021, accounting for around half of the books highlighted in the latest editions and with the prospect of easily exceeding the 50% threshold in the coming years. A scenario in which two groups dominate the vast majority of literary recommendations, which in turn determine to a large extent the reading habits of readers, appears as a threat to the diversity



of the Spanish cultural landscape, already marked by the more than notable differences in access between territories (García-Borrego and García-Cardona, 2021).

Finally, one of the most striking features is that of age (O3): the results reveal a clear inclination towards older authors over younger ones, surpassed even by those who are already deceased. As highlighted in the results section, there are more writers between 76 and 80 than those under 35, and in supplements such as *ABC Cultural*, not a single author under 35 has been detected in eleven years. Moreover, a tenth of the writers included in the lists are deceased (up to 26.5% in *ABC Cultural*), a percentage which leads to the conclusion that there are more deceased writers than under 40. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as ratifying the association of canonical works with classics (Cerrillo, 2013): it is possible that not enough time has passed for young authors to have established themselves as canonical literary figures worthy of appearing on these lists—in the academic case, a key canonisation factor is the number of publications and critical attention of the work in question. On the other hand, it can point to the hermeticism of the literary landscape, a circuit from which new writers can often find themselves excluded for extra-literary motivations. In addition, it provides reasons for the loss of strength of the literary critic in the tastes or habits of young readers, especially between 13 and 25, as is noted in Parratt-Fernández et al. (2021) and Carrasco-Molina and García-Borrego (2020). The fact that the youngest author on the lists is 25 years old (35 in *ABC Cultural*) or that the average age in all the supplements is 58.5 years old, prevents young readers from finding literary figures to reflect on, or literature that focuses on the experience of the new generations, which can only be emulated and not embodied by older writers.

The literary hierarchisation proposed by cultural supplements, considered in this study as a moulding agent of current reading habits due to its prescriptive potential, shows a notable diachronic process in the different variables studied. On the one hand, there is the promotion of the home-grown through the inclusion of works written by Spanish authors or in Spanish; although the internationalist trend has diminished this clear preference, with the United States and English being closely followed by home-grown production. The publishing monopoly has been further consolidated around the large publishing groups, Planeta and Penguin Random House, throughout the years studied, conglomerates that each year absorb relevant publishers on a national level. Finally, maturity enjoys a privileged status in the literary circuit, with older authors whose works fill the lists every year, excluding young artists from direct participation in the Spanish cultural agenda and, indirectly, in the reading habits of the public. According to the data, the prescription of cultural supplements directs the reader towards works that embody specific typological traits, despite only arguing aesthetic-literary criteria in the selection process.

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