

Caballé, Anna and Israel Rolón-Barada. *Carmen Laforet: Una mujer en fuga*. Barcelona: RBA, 2010. 515 pp. ISBN: 978-84-9867-767-6.

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This cogently written biography of acclaimed writer Carmen Laforet endeavors to uncover the myriad details heretofore undisclosed about the writer's life, relying on the undercurrent of her tendency toward evasiveness that appears to have permeated her existence, stemming from her childhood. However, in the process of collating numerous fragments, the biographers have accomplished much more. They unravel the different compartments of Laforet's life and then intertwine them to craft this life story that unfolds in tandem with creative process of the author of *Nada* (1945).

Anna Caballé and Israel Rolón-Barada's study, which garnered the Premio Gaziol 2009 for biographies and memoirs, begins with a prologue followed by 23 chapters dedicated to distinct stages of Laforet's life as well as her unique literary career and concludes with an epilogue. In order to reconstruct their subject's past, they rely on an enormous amount of private correspondence—both to and from Laforet, combined with letters exchanged between writers and other distinguished individuals—as well as multiple archival collections, personal anecdotes and extremely relevant interviews with family members, close friends and colleagues, the fruit of research that has spanned about a decade and acquaints the reader with multi-faceted layers that identify a side of Laforet different than the one the literary canon has assigned to her.

While the early chapters explain factors that contributed to molding the literary personality that forever seemed to evade the spotlight and dissuade her critics from the tendency to connect personal experiences with the fictitious creation, the ensuing chapters uncover elements that paved the journey through adult life: writing, family and travel. For instance, the years of upbringing in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria before her move to Barcelona and then to Madrid, were crucial moments in her transfer of personal experiences to the realm of fiction, most notably the lack of maternal guidance and nurturing upon the death of the mother when Carmen was about 13 years old. As the biographers show, this would have a profound impact on the novelist's creative process and would motivate her as an adult to seek the friendship of older and powerful women, for example Elena Fortún, Lili Álvarez and Carmen Conde. Further, readers will take note of Laforet as an accomplished journalist who tackles, among others, the very controversial subject of feminism with unflinching candor. She outlines a facet of

her approaches to writing as follows: “No pretendo en estos artículos que voy a comenzar sobre cualquier tema, realizar el milagro. Se irá realizando poco a poco” (323).

One chapter readers will find particularly compelling, “Escribiendo *Nada*,” outlines the convergence of personal circumstances, biographical similarities and explanations behind the creation or existence of certain characters in this watershed novel forever known as the first recipient of the prestigious Premio Nadal. These early chapters also hold interest for their value in recreating the trying times associated with the Spanish Civil War and postwar period, to which many readers could relate, and, more so, they reveal the creative process behind the novel, ending speculation regarding the timeframe that the novel was written, even though by doing so, it comes to light that the author herself was not forthcoming in interviews about this fact.

The biographers explain and document Laforet’s efforts in writing her subsequent novels, a feat accomplished in spite of the skepticism that they would not see publication and amidst the family responsibilities of a wife and mother of five young children. It is during the decisive period of the 1950s that the essence of Laforet’s writing comes more clearly into focus with the publication of *La isla y los demonios* (1952), *La mujer nueva* (1955) and the collection of the four novelettes titled *La llamada* (1954), as she juggles multiple responsibilities that her profession and her family demand, compounded by a certain degree of marginalization by contemporary intellectuals during the next decade.

Following the period that saw the publication of *La insolación* (1963) and *Paralelo 35* (1967), her first trip to the United States had a profound impact on Laforet, who met a fellow writer—indeed an admirer—with whom she would remain friends for decades to come: Ramón J. Sender. The nuances of their relationship have recently come to light through the critically significant epistolary book between these two writers edited by Rolón-Barada titled *Puedo contar contigo* (2003). Caballé and Rolón-Barada recount the next stages of their subject that include the separation from her husband and her subsequent meanderings throughout Spain and Italy. The details surrounding the decades between the time *Al volver la esquina* (the second installment of the trilogy begun with *La insolación*) was written, and re-written, then finally published in 2004 are explained, as are the circumstances regarding the regrettably lost or destroyed copy of *Jaque mate* (the last novel of her elusive trilogy). The biography’s final chapter and epilogue recount the author’s trips, thanks in large part to esteemed professor and critic Roberta Johnson, to various universities in the United States during the 1980s, places she both willingly and reluctantly visited, as well as tracing the steps of Laforet’s final years.

Readers will be intrigued by the authors’ substantiation that, although Laforet’s apparent inner demons prevented a more robust literary corpus from being published—the factors that lead to the multilayered *fuga* referenced in the title—she remained steadfast in recognizing her creative processes and capabilities. The utmost precision with which she constantly rewrote, revised, and oftentimes would throw away only to

start anew characterize a vocation that at its best drew from personal experiences, which entered the fictional reality that populates the pages of her extraordinary literary production.

This book, already in its second edition, will interest scholars and students with a desire to understand the nuances of Carmen Laforet's life that influenced her writing and public persona. Its thoroughness and exhaustive nature notably expands previous biographical accounts and opens the door to continued studies on this paramount author of Spain's twentieth century.